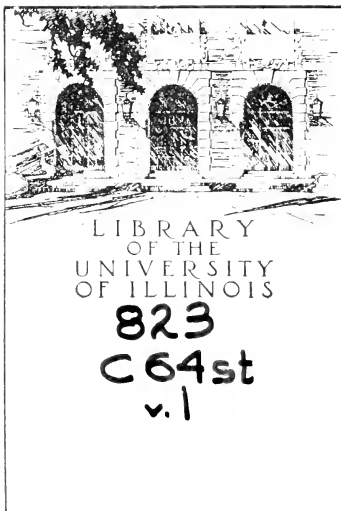


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George Cruikshank

STANLEY THORN.

BY

HENRY COCKTON, ESQ.

AUTHOR OF "VALENTINE VOX, THE VENTRILOQUIST," &c.

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

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STANLEY THORN.

CHAPTER I.

PORTRAYS, WITH OTHER FEATURES OF IMPORTANCE
THE EARLY CHARACTERISTICS OF OUR HERO.

To those who had not the honour of being extremely intimate with Alderman Thorn, it will be necessary to explain that he was a man of considerable wealth, derived chiefly from a series of successful speculations in hops; that he married very early, with the immediate view of procuring the means of entering into those speculations; that at the expiration of fifteen years from the date of his marriage certificate he was generously and formally presented with an heir, whom he caused to be baptized in the name of Stanley, in honour of an aristocratic friend of that name; that he lived in purely

aldermanic style until he arrived at the age of fifty-four, when he utterly repudiated not only all intoxicating liquors, but all animal food save that which existed invisibly in vegetables and water; that such total change of diet at his age brought on an almost perpetual shivering, which, however, failed to induce him to forego his high resolve, but which gradually killed him; that while some held a minute *post mortem* examination to be essential to the promotion of the science of pathology, others held it to be essential by no means, it being clear that his living had caused his death, or, in other words, that his alimentary canal had been completely frozen over; and finally, that he was buried with appropriate pomp, without the ice being thus sacrilegiously broken.

Having performed the pleasing duty of placing these afflicting details upon record to the perfect satisfaction, it is to be hoped, even of those by whom this worthy individual was held in high esteem, it now becomes strictly proper to state, that at the period of the lamentable dissolution of the alderman, Stanley had just completed his fifteenth year, and that he //

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hands, that, instead of regretting Bob's absence, as at first, he began to like it rather than not.

The gentle Joanna had heard much of the venerable gentleman from Bob. She had heard of his high-toned gentleman-like bearing, of his honourable and strictly virtuous principles, of his brilliant conversational qualities, and of the general generosity of his heart. She had, moreover, heard that he possessed some considerable property, which, in her gentle judgment, imparted an additional lustre to the whole. She had, therefore, been powerfully prepossessed in his favour before she had the honour of an introduction; and his conduct in her presence was so perfectly correct, that she felt a strong conviction that the high and noble qualities of his heart and mind had been to some considerable extent understated. It is true he was rather an elderly gentleman; but it is also true that he was, in her opinion, an exceedingly nice-looking, elderly gentleman, who, although in reality sixty, might pass very well for forty-six or

forty-seven, considering that the hair even of young men will sometimes turn grey !

There was, however, one consideration which—as she confidentially consulted her friend, the pillow, night after night—caused her to reflect deeply upon the solemn and irrevocable step she contemplated. This consideration was a high one,—it being no other than that of what the world would say,—and therefore one which induced her to pause, and very naturally, seeing that she was known, not only to the whole of her fellow servants, but to the milkman, the laundress, the baker's man, and the butcher. It was hence in her view of the deepest importance that due deference should be paid in this matter to the opinion of the world, knowing well, as she did know, that nothing on earth tends to promote human happiness more than the consciousness of being by the world looked up to and respected. For some time this objection appeared to be insuperable. She could *not* get over it. Many restless days and sleepless nights did she pass in deep reflection. She even went to the most eminent

astrologer of the age for the purpose of having her nativity cast, and was greatly relieved when that profoundly learned person informed her that she would have two husbands, and be with both extremely prosperous and happy : it seemed to be so very conclusive. Still the question of what the world would say was continually upon her lips while she zealously racked her imagination to conceive a sound and sufficient answer to that question ; for she imagined, and very correctly, that, if the world should be up in arms in consequence of her marrying an elderly gentleman, it might to some extent interfere with her connubial bliss.

At length, however, having considered the matter in all its parts and bearings, she safely arrived at this conclusion, that it would not by any means become her to fly in the teeth of fate, and that, feeling quite sure that the venerable gentleman had been distinctly destined to be her first, it was her duty to surrender herself meekly to circumstances over which she could not be supposed to have control.

She therefore made a dead set at him at

once, and called into action all her artillery, with the view of attacking his susceptible heart. She established in his presence one perpetual smile—which was indeed a very sweet one of the sort—sighed occasionally with very great effect, and glanced at him with constancy, and corresponding bashfulness, and frequently while playing removed the wrong peg, at the same time protesting that she actually didn't know what she was about—she didn't actually.

At the commencement of these affectionate proceedings the venerable gentleman rallied her gaily, and whenever he did so she felt herself bound to become so confused that she couldn't play at all, she couldn't count, she couldn't help pegging backwards, and the consequence was that she couldn't win a game; but, albeit these little manœuvres were for some time regarded by the experienced eye of her venerable partner with suspicion, her emotion was so deep, and so strong, and so strikingly developed, that while he still entertained the belief that as a general thing love was a gross imposition, he eventually could not

but feel that in the gentle Joanna he had discovered the exception that established the rule. He was sure that she loved him—fondly, passionately loved him; she couldn't help showing it! In his view a man must be blind who couldn't see it: the thing was so palpable: nothing could be clearer; and to be beloved at his age, and that, too, by a finely-built, cherry-cheeked, nicely-behaved, comfortable-looking creature nearly thirty years younger than himself, was an idea which flattered the venerable gentleman: he felt it very deeply, and thought of it constantly; and as he experienced a variety of sweet feelings which were altogether new to him, he resolved to be, if possible, more killing than ever, as the first grand preliminary to his seeing precisely what could be done. He accordingly became more refined in his language, and dressed with more care, and displayed more agility; and not only related the feats he had performed, but dwelt upon those which he was able with ease to perform then: in short, having the most tender aspirations by which a lover could be prompted,

he felt that his success as a lover was essential to the maintenance of his reputation as a man : although he knew that when two devoted persons try to win each other's hearts, they seldom, indeed, try in vain. He became much more constant in his visits, and was delighted when Bob was absent, which frequently happened, as he went with his master down to the House, and occasionally waited there for hours.

On one of these occasions, when the lovers had been playing at their favourite game for some time without the slightest interruption, the venerable gentleman, conscious of the high estimation in which wealth is held by ladies in general, and how greatly it assists the imagination in all matters of love, embraced a fine opportunity, which the fact of his having won ninepence afforded, for making the following remarkable observation :

“ Wot a hexcellent thing lots o’ money is, ain’t it ? ”

Joanna blushed deeply, and felt extremely tremulous ; but, conceiving it to be her duty to say something, she faintly replied,

“Why, it certingly is an excessively excellent thing; but happiness for me, Mr. Joseph, before all the money. Happiness isn’t to be bought, for there’s no shop in life where it’s sold.”

“That’s hall werry reg’lar,” rejoined the venerable gentleman. “You’re quite correctly right in that air: still money’s a hout and hout thing! on’y go for to look at the advantages on it!—on’y see ‘ow hindependent they are, them as does persess lots; vile them as don’t, is in a wuss state of slavery than the black popplation there out by the North Pole. They’re never theirselves, them as ain’t got no money. They can’t hold their heads up: it’s clean against natur’. Jist p’int out to me a hindiividual a-vendin’ his vay along the streets, on’y jist let me look at him full in the face, and if I don’t tell you vether he’s got any money or not, I’ll be bound to be blessed; cos he as hasn’t, allus looks werry petickler down his nose; vile he as has, takes about as much notice of that horgan as if he hadn’t got one. He can’t look right straight at yer, him wot’s

got all his pockets empty ; he can't ketch yer hearty and vorm by the hand ; he can't speak like a hinnercent man : his woice shivers and shakes jist for all the world as if it vos ashamed of itself ; and he mumbles, and trembles, and wobbles, vile the corners of his mouth drops right away down in the rottenest manner alive ; verehas, the man vich has got plenty in his pocket can look at yer fierce. He can take yer hand with henergy, and speak up as if he owed yer nothink, and vornt a bit afeared on yer, vich makes great hodd's ! Ven I meets a friend, now, vich ain't got no money, I don't like to see him,—I can't say I do,—not a bit acos I'm spungy, or anythink o'that ; but I'd rayther not see him. I some'ow or nother don't like it. I pities him ; and, as pity wounds the feelings, it ain't consequentially pleasant. If a friend in them there circumstantial's ses to me, ' Have yer got sich a thing as a couple o' shillin's, it cuts me to the quick ; not acos I at all objects to lend it, nor cos I don't hand him over double wot he arsts for, and never expects to vitness agin the colour of

the money, but it's cos it hurts my sentiments to see him, and wounds me to think wot his feelings must be. That's the p'int, you know! that's vere he feels it!"

"Exactly," returned Joanna: "you're excessively correct; but that warn't by no manner of means what I meant. I didn't by any means mean to mean that money was no object, or that it wasn't an excessive advantage: no, if I thought that, I should not have put by for a rainy day, as I have done. I shouldn't have thought of having such an amount as I have in the saving's banks at the present period of time. All I meant was, that money wasn't all; that money alone couldn't purchase happiness, and therefore that happiness was to be preferred."

"And in the long run I agrees with yer. 'Appiness, in course, his the thing—the great thing: ve can't git through the vorld at all comfortable vithout it; but though it is to be found in hevery spere of society, from Vestmister to Vopping, vere can it be found without money? I don't mean to say that they're un-

seperateable,—that is to say, that verever there's money there must be 'appiness consequentially also ; but I do mean to say, that verever there's 'appiness, there there must likewise be money. There can't be no 'appiness vithout it. It stands to reason ; it ain't nat'ral ! Look at them vich is in debt : 'ow can they be 'appy ?" I'll defy 'em to do it ! It's out of natur' for 'em to be 'appy, from the highest spere down to the werry lowest,—from him vich owes his banker arf a million, to him as owes his chandley-shop-keeper arf-a-crown. It's onpossible ! Look at me o'ny jist for instance. I've got seven houses vich brings me in fifty pound a-ear, all let to respectable tenants, substantial men of family vich never shoots the moon, and the writings is at home. Werry well. Now vot,—s'pose I should be throwed out o' place,—vot should I care, vith them to fall back upon ? Nothink. But s'pose I hadn't them, and then vos to be throwed out vithout the prospect of gettin' another, vereabouts vood be the price of my 'appiness then ? Voodn't it be out of all

character for me to be 'appy? In course : vere poverty is, there 'appiness can't be. They never agree together ; they're hallvays a-fightin', and poverty's safe to be wictorious."

"I admire your mode of argument," observed Joanna, gently ; "it's excessively intellectual and correct ; but have you never, in the course of your extensive experience, found those that are poor as happy as those that are rich ?"

"Vy," replied the venerable gentleman, knitting his brows thoughtfully, "that is a p'int vich requires to be explained. You see, the poor is sometimes richer than the rich ; and, on the tother side 'o the pictur', the rich is sometimes poorer than the poor. I don't call him poor, however poor he may be, vich has got enough to keep him respectable in his spere ; nor I don't call him rich, however rich he may be, vich hasn't got enough to keep him respectable in hisn. A rich man may be werry rich, and a poor man may be werry poor, and between them a werry great distinction may be drawed ; but the poor man, vich has but

twelve shillin's a week, and vith that can supply all his vonts, is richer than him vith ten thousand a-ear, hif vith that he's onable to make both ends meet. That's the p'int! So, you see, I don't call the poor reg'lar poor vich has enough to make 'em comfor'ble and tidy in their vay; but ven a poor man is poor, vy he's werry poor indeed, cos he can't get no wittles; and, as 'appiness *von't* stay vere there's no wittles, the whole p'int dissolves jist to this, that the rich rich is 'appier than the poor rich, mind yer,—and the rich poor is 'appier than the werry poor poor, vich ain't got no wittles to eat."

"I understand you perfectly," said Joanna; "it's excessively clear; and precisely what I meant. I meant I'd rather be in a poor sphere of life, with sufficient to make me excessively happy, than in a high sphere, rolling in riches, without having happiness with it."

"*That's* all reg'lar!" exclaimed the venerable gentleman: "ve're a-balancin' the werry same pole! 'Appiness, in course, is the uniwersal thing, and consequentially ve're

hallvays a-yarnin' arter that vich ve think vill percure it, and vich is nayther more nor less than money ; for, although vot you say is werry true, that there's no shop in natur' vere 'appiness, like any other harticle, is ticketed and sold, there is thousands of shops vere it is, in a hindirect manner, to be bought ; as, for hinstance, if I vos werry ungry, and unger vos the on'y sore place I had about me, a crust of bread and cheese and a pint of arf-and-arf vood make me 'appy ; but, if I hadn't got no money to buy that bread and cheese and arf-and-arf, I shoold be werry onappy indeed. So, you see, it hall depends upon vether you can git vot yer vont : if yer can, in course yer 'appy : if yer can't, in course you ain't. For hinstance, now I vont a vife. If I could get one—a reg'lar good un—I should then be all right ; but as I can't, 'ow can I be happy?"

Joanna blushed deeply as she observed, with a most expressive smile,

"Now, Mr. Joseph, you are joking."

"Not a bit," rejoined the venerable gentleman : "no, upon my honer."

“ *Did* you ever try ? ”

“ Vy, I can’t sconsientiously say I ever did.”

“ Then how can you know ? You cannot know until you try.”

“ But I’m gettin’ rayther a hold feller now, yer know, inclinin’, as the poet says, ‘into the wale of ears’ ; so that nobody ’ll ’ave me.”

“ Nobody would have you ! ” echoed Joanna, with an expression of playful incredulity.

“ Vell, who vood now ? That’s the p’int at hissee. Vood you ? ”

The ardent and affectionate heart of Joanna now violently throbbed ; but, as she felt it to be her duty to blush and remain silent, she made no reply.

“ Vell, p’raps,” continued the venerable gentleman, as Joanna glanced most expressively at him,—“ p’raps I put the p’int rayther too close, as yer werry perliteness vont let you say no.”

“ Oh ! it isn’t for that,” observed Joanna, very tremulously.

“ Vell, then, I’ll tell you vot I’ll do vith you.

Come, now, I'll bet you a pair of gloves that you can't, sconsientiously, mind yer, say yes."

"What a funny man you are!" said Joanna.

"It vood, I know, be a robbery. I know I shood vin."

"Do you think so?"

"Safe! Come, I'll make it two to one,—there, and put the money down: they shall be arf-crowners, double-stitched Frenchmen. Vill you take them ere hodd's?"

"You 'd lose," said Joanna, with archness, —"you 'd be certain to lose."

"I don't think it, nor von't till I have lost. Now, then, vill you bet?"

"Why really!—Mr. Joseph!—I never knew! —it 's such a very droll way of doing business!"

"Vot 's the hodd's, so that business is done?"

"But indeed — depend upon it — you 'd lose."

"Werry well. If I do, I shall have to stand the Frenchmen, that 's all. Come, put the money down,—or I'll trust yer. Now, then,"

continued the venerable gentleman, kneeling upon the footstool beside her, and placing his ear quite close to her lips, “come, visper, and then nayther the kittles nor the sarcepans vont ear. Now mark! Vood you ’ave me?”

The venerable gentleman patiently paused some considerable time for a reply; but at length Joanna did sigh and say “Now—really!”

“Only visper the word!”

“Upon my conscience I feel so frustrated; indeed so excessively confused, that I cannot for the life of me.”

“Oh, but come—now then—vonce more. Vood you ave me?”

With a faltering voice, and a fluttering heart, the gentle creature, in a tone which scarcely violated silence, said—“*Yes.*”

“You vood!” exclaimed the venerable gentleman,—“sconscientiously!”

He drew back a trifle; and, having gazed in a state of rapture at her lustrous eyes for a moment, threw his arm round her beautiful swan-like neck and clandestinely kissed her.

“Nay, you wicked man,” said the blushing Joanna, “that ’s excessively naughty.”

“Vell, give it me back! If you don’t like to ’ave it, return it to the lips from vence it came.”

“No, that I am sure I ’ll not do.”

“Oh, nonsense!” cried the venerable gentleman, throwing his arm again round her elegant neck, “I must test your sincerity!”

“Don’t, Mr. Joseph: you ’ll rumple my collar: indeed, Mr. Joseph, indeed, indeed you will!”

Joanna struggled very correctly; but the venerable gentleman’s ardour increased; and, just as he had succeeded in drawing her sweet lips to his, Bob, who had entered the kitchen during the struggle unperceived, cried “*Hem!*”

Had there been a trap-door beneath the gentle Joanna, through which she could at once have disappeared, her disappearance would certainly have been instantaneous, she

felt at the moment so dreadfully alarmed ; but as there happened to be no such a piece of theatrical machinery near her, she summoned all her courage, and turning promptly to Bob, said, " Isn't it too bad, Robert ? Here, just because I happen to have won five shillings of Mr. Joseph, he vows he 'll have a kiss, which is very unfair, Robert, isn't it now ? "

Bob looked at her fiercely, and said in answer to this strong appeal, " It ain't nothing to me." He also looked fiercely at his venerable friend, and added, " I 'm a-intruding."

These indeed were very cutting observations, and they had a very powerful effect. The lovers wished he had been at that moment drinking with Pharaoh and all his host ; but as they gave no expression to that wish, he gloomily seated himself near the fire, and looked into it with a most ferocious aspect.

As the venerable gentleman could not of course feel exactly comfortable then, he soon prepared to depart : he took Bob's passive hand,

and having bade him good night, Joanna saw him to the door, where he kissed her again, and, singularly enough, she returned it then without any struggling at all.

CHAPTER II.

THE PETITION; ITS PROGRESS AND RESULT.

STANLEY had been nearly a fortnight in the House without having on any occasion risen to speak. During that time he had heard many excellent speeches, and many more which, although delivered in an execrable style, read and told well in the papers. His ambition had therefore been constantly strengthened, and as most men, who feel that they possess the power to shine in the particular circle in which they move, are desirous of cultivating those accomplishments, whatever they may be, by which applause is obtained in that circle, it is not singular that he, possessing the necessary confidence, panted to distinguish him-

self in that centre from which celebrity radiates throughout the world.

Having studied one important subject deeply, and made himself conversant with all its ramifications, he went down to the House on the fourteenth day of his being a member, with the view of startling the nerves of all parties by the development of what he had in him. Previously, however, to the commencement of the debate in which he intended to take a conspicuous part, an honourable member on the opposite side presented a petition against his return !

At the moment Stanley could, with great pleasure, have kicked him. He felt in a rage with that man. He might have been, for aught he knew or cared, a virtuous person ; but as he returned to his seat with a calm but triumphant smile, having performed what he conceived to be his duty,—Stanley *looked* at him !—in one word, he certainly would have knocked him down, if the forms of the House had allowed it.

It is, perhaps, amazing that the strongest

minds are capable of being upset in an instant. A man may have a perfect command over his features ; he may have an equally perfect command over his nerves ; but he cannot have a perfect command, nor anything like a perfect command, over his mind. He may be able to stand and walk erect ; he may be able to maintain the steadiness of his eye and the firmness of his voice ; he may be able to suppress every show of emotion, but he cannot suppress the emotion itself. He may have in full bloom what is technically termed “ moral courage,”—for technical the term may be said to be, seeing that physical courage is hard to be defined ;—he may be extremely calm and collected ; he may conceal effectually his feelings from others, but from himself they will not be concealed. Within his own breast they are in full operation : their influence may rack him, although the effect be unseen ; and precisely thus stood Stanley. He scorned to betray his feelings when the hateful petition was presented, but they were acute notwithstanding : indeed, so acute that they prompted him to withhold

hat brilliant speech with which he intended to astonish the House. The thing came upon him so unexpectedly, he was not prepared for the blow. He knew of course that the opposing party had been zealous in their efforts to get up a petition, but he had been led by his agents to believe that those efforts had utterly failed ; when, however, he actually saw the unblest document, he could no longer lay the flattering unction to his soul which those agents had been from the first prescribing.

“ I have been grossly deceived,” said he, addressing Sir William, who sat by his side. “ Those fellows assured me that the idea of a petition was, under the circumstances, absurd.”

“ Oh, it may come to nothing now,” returned the Baronet. “ This is the last day on which it could be presented. The prosecution of a petition does not of necessity follow its presentation. The chances are that it will yet be abandoned.”

“ I fear not,” said Stanley.

“ Why fear ?”

“ Because the grounds upon which they

stand are too tenable to justify a hope that the thing will be relinquished."

"The grounds !" exclaimed Sir William. "The grounds have little indeed to do with the matter. It depends upon the committee. If you get a majority,—and, of course, we must have a whip for it,—you are safe : you need not care then a single straw about the grounds."

Stanley appreciated this remark very highly. He knew that, although in strictly barbarous states the system of trying the merits of petitions by a directly responsible tribunal might obtain, it would be in a country so enlightened as this repudiated, not only as ridiculous but dangerous, inasmuch as the practice established was of such surpassing excellence that it rendered the operation of party bias and factious influence almost impossible, and particularly in cases in which parties are so nicely balanced that the loss of a vote on either side is of very great importance : he knew also that every member was at that happy period an honourable man, and so strictly pure in principle that he would rather see his own

party go to the dogs than sacrifice or even slightly tamper with his conscience: he moreover knew that, albeit certain signally uncivilized persons had attempted to upset the just and most salutary system established, their attempts had utterly and of course most deservedly failed; still, with all this knowledge, he felt apprehensive that, whether he obtained a majority or not, his seat would be lost, and was therefore at first indisposed to defend it.

Sir William, however, powerfully painted to him the almost unprecedented folly of yielding, and as most men are guided by the opinions of others—if even they conceive their own judgment to be superior—provided always that their vanity is flattered, so Stanley, although he knew that the allegations contained in the petition were true, and that therefore, under the system proposed by the unconstitutional innovators referred to, he would have had no chance at all of retaining his seat,—surrendered his own judgment to that of Sir William, in

the full and lively hope of being able to whip in a just and one-sided committee.

This hope, however, although it sustained him for a time, was not realised. The committee was moved for; the whip was used on both sides with great effect, and the result was seven to four against him. The great point of Sir William was thus at once destroyed, and Stanley again felt disposed to retire; but Sir William, knowing well what the expenses of defending a seat under the circumstances usually were, and being still sincerely anxious to reduce him to a state of destitution, shifted his ground, and not only ridiculed the idea of giving in, but contended for self-conviction in such a case being comparable only with suicide; and in this he was ably seconded by the Widow.

“It would be, you know, such an extremely shocking thing,” said that lady, when her opinion of the matter had been demanded; “it would be absolutely dreadful—dear me, it would be an eternal disgrace—to retire from

the field without a struggle, you know, my dear!"

"Mother," said Stanley, "look at the expense."

"A fig for the expense, my love! we are not poor! I look at the thing in the abstract!"

"You do, without reference to the cost. Look at that in the abstract! I confess that I have an imperfect knowledge of the expense of these things; but I know it to be something very very considerable."

"Well, my love! let it be considerable. Thank Heaven we are not beggars! But we are not *beaten* yet! Where is your philosophy, my dear? Should we make ourselves wretched to-day because it happens to be possible for us to be wretched to-morrow? Oh, dear me no! defend the seat by all means."

"Mother," rejoined Stanley, "you know me, I think, too well to believe that I would not do so if I saw the slightest prospect of success."

"My dearest boy, I know that you would not; I am perfectly certain of that; but then, although you cannot see this prospect, others

can! Good gracious me! what does Sir William say?—does he not say that these things are all a lottery?”

“ But how can we reasonably hope to succeed, when we know nearly all with which we are charged to be true?”

“ True!—my dear! Has not Sir William again and again said, that a thousand things may be true which cannot be proved?”

“ I have of course no inclination to resign, which you know: if I conceived it to be probable that my seat could be retained, I would defend it with all the means in my power; but as the case stands at present I cannot perceive a chance.”

“ Oh, there are a thousand chances; rely on it, my love, there are ten thousand chances, although you do not perceive them. Besides, if even the worst should come to the worst, we are surely, my love, as capable of bearing our share of the expenses as the Swansdown faction are of bearing theirs!”

“ But that may not be the worst. Suppose we are fixed with all the costs?”

“ Oh, but you know, Sir William says that

an instance of that kind has not occurred within his recollection !”

“ But the thing is not impossible : it may occur in *our* case, and if it should, can it be borne without sensibly affecting your fortune ?”

“ Of course ! Dear me, my love, what a ridiculous question !”

“ Oh, I know nothing about your affairs : you have always most studiously kept them from me !”

“ Fear nothing on that score ; by all means oppose this horrible petition.”

“ Very well : but understand, that if opposed at all it must be opposed with spirit ; no expense must be spared ; there must be no stopping short ; the thing once begun must be carried on boldly to the end !”

“ That is precisely my feeling. Never mind the expense ; do not dream about that. Have everything that may be deemed essential to success. We shall beat them ! I am sure that we shall beat them. It would be such a truly dreadful thing, you know, my love, to give up all without an effort to retain it. It

would look so cowardly and would be so disgraceful, as Sir William *says* ! I should go mad ! I am sure of it. I never could be happy again. Therefore, oppose them, my love, by all means ; oppose them with all your power. Engage the highest talent available. Stanley, my dearest love ! let me prevail upon you : will you oppose them ?”

Stanley consented. He had of course no desire to relinquish his seat : he never had ; but knowing well that his election must have cost something very considerable, although the amount had been concealed from him, he felt, being ignorant of the Widow’s resources, that the expense of opposing the petition—if the opposition *should* be reported “frivolous and vexatious,” might involve them all in ruin. When, however, he heard that the worst could be borne without any material or permanent injury, he resolved to go on with the opposition boldly : he would not yield an inch ; he defied them to prove their allegations, although he knew them to be true, declaring that his seat should be defended till the last. The battle then commenced. The opening speeches

were made. Coach-loads of witnesses were brought up to town, and among them Stanley recognised many, whom, during the election, he had treated with the utmost kindness and liberality. On ascertaining the quarters of these people, he sent an agent to remonstrate with them; but they viewed the affair as a mere matter of business declaring that they had no private feeling either way; that the franchise was a property of which they had a clear and indisputable right to make the most, that every contingency increased its value, and that if Stanley wanted them, why he might have them even then. The agent spoke of gratitude, of course, and enlarged on its brightness and beauty; and they agreed with him; they thought it an excellent thing, and they said so, and contended that its value should be commensurate with its excellence, and at the same time declared that they had plenty to sell, and should be glad to dispose of their whole stock at a price. As, however, it was deemed inexpedient under the circumstances to purchase this inestimable commodity of them—the in-

vestment not being quite safe—there was no business done ; the agent left them in possession of their gratitude, which, if all had been taken at their own valuation, would have made a man wealthy indeed.

There was, however, another class of witnesses of a far more formidable character, inasmuch as they were actuated by feelings of revenge, and had a certain amount of social respectability about them which imparted a nominal purity to their testimony, and thereby gave it an additional weight. These were the tradesmen whom the chairman of Stanley's committee had insulted by his shabby and unconstitutional refusal to meet their prescriptive demands. The rest of the witnesses against him cared nothing about the result ; they had no vindictive feeling to gratify ; their object was to make all the money they could, and it mattered not a straw to them which party triumphed ; but these men had set their noble souls upon his defeat ; they had firmly resolved to do all in their power to ensure his political destruction ; he had robbed them—for it is

a real robbery, when the thing is properly looked at, to refuse to pay respectable men what is regular—and, therefore, they had one and all determined to stick at nothing which could tend to promote the accomplishment of the just and legitimate object in view.

The committee sat daily ; but their progress was but slow. The counsel on both sides displayed all the eloquence, zeal, and ingenuity they had in them, and bullied each other with admirable ferocity. On one point, however, they seemed to be agreed, and that was to make the thing last as long as possible. It seldom indeed happens in ordinary cases, that opposing counsel agree at all ; but it is an extraordinary fact, that in this case they were on that great point perfectly unanimous. During the examination of witnesses an objection was started at every third question with the utmost regularity and tact, and the speeches which succeeded those objections respectively were remarkable as well for their length as for the sound deliberation with which they were delivered.

After a week or two the honourable members of the committee became naturally tired of the business ; but the witnesses in the aggregate were by no means impatient : they cared not how long the thing lasted ; it met their views precisely ; nothing on earth could have suited them better ; they were not only living like Aldermen in town, but really beginning to get into flesh.

At length, when all concerned save counsel and these philosophic witnesses, were weary, the labours of the committee were brought to an end, and the result was, that they reported the opposition to the petition "*frivolous and vexatious*," and thus fixed Stanley with the whole of the costs, which were enormous !

This to him and his immediate friends was indeed a heavy blow ; but poor Amelia felt it most deeply. Her anguish was poignant in the extreme, and while she tried to soothe her Stanley, whose high hopes had thus been blasted, she would hang upon his neck and sob as if her heart were breaking.

To Sir William and his associates, Stanley



Lecturer

wished it to appear that he was comparatively indifferent about the matter, but when in the presence of the Widow alone, his rage could not be calmed.

“ You see,” he exclaimed, when the result became known, “ you see the position to which you have reduced me !”

“ I, my love ?”

“ Yes, mother, you !”

“ Gracious heavens ! what can you mean ?”

“ Did you not prompt me to pursue this mad course ? Should I have opposed this infernal petition had it not been for you ?”

“ My love ! you know that I advised you for the best !”

“ You advised me for the worst ! You imagined, I suppose, that it would tame me. I was a fool to follow your advice ; a wretched, a consummate fool !”

“ Stanley ! Stanley !” exclaimed the Widow, bursting into tears, as he fiercely paced the room. “ Oh ! this is cruel—very cruel ! You ought not to be unkind, indeed, indeed, you

ought not to afflict me thus ! You should consider that I have feelings, Stanley."

" Mother, you do not consider that *I* have feelings !"

" I do : I do, indeed ! I know that my poor boy must feel it most deeply : but do not, pray do not, add gall to this calamity ; do not increase our affliction by attributing motives which you must know could never have actuated me. But, my dearest love, can we not appeal ?"

" Appeal ! No, there is no appeal."

" But the decision was corrupt, my love ; grossly corrupt. The committee were guided by factious views solely, and while the counsel against us were demons, our own counsel ought to be ashamed of themselves for having suffered the fiends to go on so. Now, under these circumstances, you know, my love, it strikes me—"

" Again I tell you, there is no appeal ! And if there were ; if even I could appeal, I would not. I know that these monstrous expenses

must materially affect our fortunes. I am sure of it, quite sure, although you conceal the fact from me."

"They are indeed heavy; very heavy indeed."

"You admit, then," demanded Stanley fiercely, "you admit that they have involved us?"

"No, my love; no, no; they have not involved us. I said that they were heavy!—I merely said that. But come, my love, all will be well. Come, be calm and kind; you are my only joy; I cannot be happy if you are not kind."

The Widow again burst into tears and buried her face in his bosom. She knew that that which Stanley suspected was true; she was conscious that these enormous costs, immediately following the expenses of the election, *had* involved her, and although she had yet but an imperfect knowledge of the extent, she knew well, that her position would be sensibly affected.

And Sir William knew it too, and was glad.

The destruction of Amelia's virtue being his object, he now felt more than ever sure that that object would, at no remote period, be attained.

CHAPTER III.

IN WHICH A HIGHLY-IMPORTANT SECRET IS
DISCLOSED.

NOTWITHSTANDING the earnest anxiety of the Widow to disguise the real state of the case, her true position soon appeared. Persons may with success conceal their thoughts, their emotions, or even their wealth; but their poverty will not be concealed: it will out; it will make itself manifest: the more energetic may be the efforts to keep it from view, the more boldly will it rear its hateful head to proclaim its existence to the world.

If the Widow, when she found herself embarrassed had immediately retrenched, all would have been so far well as that she might have been able, with economy, to maintain some-

thing bearing the semblance of her customary style; but as, instead of acting promptly upon the principle of retrenchment, she not only lived as before, but incurred those additional expenses which are invariably consequent on an ardent desire to preserve a reputation for wealth when the means have departed, the necessity in her case for selling out became so constant that in a short time she possessed but little stock, indeed, to sell.

This she concealed as long as possible from Stanley. She trembled at the thought of its becoming known to him: the idea was, in her judgment, dreadful.

“Oh!” she would exclaim in tones of agony, when alone, “what on earth would he say he if knew it! He must not be told: he would go raving mad! and yet, how can I now keep it from him? What am I to do? How—how can I act? I cannot—I dare not go on longer thus: he will be reduced to beggary! Oh! my poor boy! It is terrible—very, very terrible! The thought of it will drive me to distraction!”

But even this was not all. Had Stanley alone been concerned in the impending disclosure, it might have been borne: nay, she would then have summoned sufficient courage to impart the dreadful secret to him at once, for her embarrassments were daily becoming deeper and deeper still; but the thought of what Sir William would say, of what *he* would think of it, and how *he* would act, tortured her so cruelly that, although in his presence she wore a constant smile, and expressed the highest pleasure, her heart was in reality full of affliction.

And oh! how she then sighed and panted to hear him propose! She had been for many months in the liveliest anticipation of being blessed by receiving a proposal in due form, and yet, albeit in her view, the question had been twenty times all but put, it had never been proposed with sufficient distinctness to warrant a formal consent. This was very distressing: it was indeed very. If he had but proposed to her then,—all might have been well,—all, at least, might have been without

sorrow endured ; but, although he still visited with all his wonted constancy, although he still conversed with his usual warmth and eloquence, she could *not* tempt him to come to the point.

At length, having waited for this important question until she began to despair, her difficulties became too palpable to escape even the tardy observation of Stanley. He had previously entertained suspicions on the subject ; but, as he hated to enter into matters of a pecuniary character, those suspicions had not taken root : indeed could he have got from time to time the sums of money he required, things might have gone on and on for years, without his troubling himself to give the matter another thought. When, however, he experienced a difficulty in getting what he wanted, his previous suspicions were re-awakened, and he resolved to have them either removed or confirmed.

“ Mother,” said he, “ yesterday I asked you for money. You put me off : you were anxious not to draw too close : I should have

some soon ; in a day or so ; to-morrow, perhaps ! Why is this ? Why have you not plenty at your bankers ? The time is come, mother, when I cannot but deem it necessary that I should know the cause."

The widow, without answering, burst into tears.

"Why, what is the meaning of this?" demanded Stanley, having regarded her intently for a moment. "There is something—*something* which you have hitherto concealed, but which must be concealed from me no longer."

"My poor boy!" sobbed the widow. "The dreadful secret must be told ! I have struggled—Heaven knows how I have struggled—to keep it from you."

"What is it?" cried Stanley, with impatience.

"You will never be able to bear it : I am sure you never will."

"Whatever it be, mother, let me know at once, that I may at once guard against its effect."

"Those dreadful expenses, my Stanley !—those terrible expenses !"

“ Have ruined us !”

“ No—no—no—no—! . not ruined—oh !
Heaven forbid !”

“ What am I to understand, then ?” cried Stanley. “ If they have not ruined us, what have they done ?”

“ So embarrassed us, my Stanley, that you must—oh, how it afflicts me to tell you!—you must, at least for a time, manage to live upon the estate which was purchased for your qualification.”

“ Impossible ! How can I live on a pitiful three or four hundred a year ? How can I entertain those friends whom I have been in the habit of entertaining ? how can I meet them ? how can I even show my face ? Mother !” —

“ Stanley, do not be rash : pray do not be impetuous ! You will break my heart ! indeed, my love, indeed it was all done for you. Come, come ! You *will* be calm, dear Stanley ? You will be calm ? You will not make this wound deeper than it is, or cause it to rankle, dear

Stanley? Heaven knows I would have given worlds if this dreadful disclosure could by any earthly means have been avoided."

"Why did you not tell me before? Why buoy me up with the hope—nay with the absolute belief that our fortunes had not been materially affected? Why did you not explain to me at once that we were ruined, beggared, comparatively beggared!"

"I dared not; indeed, my love, I dared not do it. I dreaded nothing on earth more. But, believe me, dear, I'll make every sacrifice in my power to promote your happiness still."

"Sacrifice! What sacrifice have you now the power to make?"

"I'll reduce my establishment; I'll put down my carriage; I'll do anything in the world to diminish my expenditure; indeed, dear, I will; I'll live retired—quite retired. I shall be happy—I feel I shall be happy—very happy, if you are but so."

"Don't talk to me of happiness, mother. How can you, or I, or any one be happy when fallen? The idea is monstrous! You now

perceive the consequence, I hope, of endeavouring to conceal everything from me."

"Believe me, dear Stanley, I did all for the best."

"But do you think that if I had known what I ought to have known, I would have opposed that petition? Do you *think* that I would have been guilty of an act of madness so palpable, so glaring? Why was the thing kept from me?"

"My love, you know that I am at all times unwilling to annoy you. You know that if it were possible to prevent it, I would not have your mind distressed for the world."

"Well!" cried Stanley, still pacing the room with violence. "The thing is done. The die is cast. We are ruined. Now, I suppose, I *may* know something of your affairs!"

"My dear Stanley, all shall be explained."

"I insist upon having all explained."

"You shall have it, my dear: yes, believe me, you shall. But, although very terrible, it is not so bad as you imagine—it is not, indeed."

“ I do not imagine that we are reduced to actual destitution ; but I do imagine that henceforth our position will be sufficiently mean to cause society to shun us. I can’t live on three or four hundred a year.”

“ I know—I know you cannot ; nor will there be any necessity for you to endeavour to do so : I feel perfectly sure that there will not. No—no, my dear, things may yet be better than you suppose—much better. Let us hope for the best. I am sure I do not know myself yet how we stand. But my affairs shall be immediately adjusted—yes, I’ll have them all investigated properly, and at once ; and then we shall see, dear Stanley—we shall see.”

Stanley was sullenly silent. A dreary prospect opened to his view. And in the whole social scale, there is, perhaps, no position so annoying, so perpetually painful, or so pregnant with temptation to dishonour, as that of a young and ardent spirit, who—being without influential family connections, and, at the same time, without a profession—finds himself sud-

denly thrown upon his own resources, or placed below the sphere—be that sphere what it may—in which he had theretofore moved. The uncontrollable nature of circumstances renders the folly—it may be termed, the thoughtless cruelty—of teaching young men to depend solely upon the wealth of relatives, instead of giving them a profession upon which to fall back in case of need, so conspicuous, that it is, in truth, amazing, when reverses of fortune so constantly occur, that the paltry pride of parents, on this great point, should be suffered to supersede their manifest duty.

This darkly appeared to Stanley then ; and the more darkly, seeing that he had no direct knowledge of the position to which he had been reduced ; but the widow, being far more sanguine, scarcely gave this a thought : her strongest apprehension was that of losing Sir William ; it was that which, in reality, afflicted her most, and, being almost unable to endure the thought of the discontinuance of his visits, she would have gone on as usual, in the lively anticipation of a formal proposal being made,

had not Stanley, being impatient to know the worst, insisted upon an immediate investigation of affairs, which accordingly commenced without further delay.

CHAPTER IV.

SHOWS HOW A RECONCILIATION TOOK PLACE
BETWEEN BOB AND HIS VENERABLE FRIEND.

WHEN the reduction of an establishment is about to take place, and more especially if the establishment be an old one, whatever may be the tact with which it is managed, whatever may be the secrecy with which you proceed, it is perfectly sure to be generally known : indeed, any attempt at secrecy does but increase the evil, inasmuch as it establishes a mystery, and mysteries are invariably pregnant with conjectures, which are certain to make the thing worse than it is.

Now this is, of course, a remarkable fact, and one, moreover, ascribable solely to one's utter inability to get rid of servants, under the

circumstances, with any degree of quietude or comfort. When these useful people have long been in the habit of giving "good satisfaction," they well know that they would not be discharged without a cause, and you cannot—no act of caprice can—deprive them of the additional knowledge of whether their conduct, in reality, constitutes that cause or not. If it do, why there, of course, is an end of the matter; but if it do not, they watch events narrowly, and if none be engaged in their places, they see how it is, and never fail to report what they see; in fact, they deem it their duty to do so in their own justification, and that they ought to be justified, is strictly correct.

Now in this particular case, the afflicted widow no sooner found it to be necessary for her to relinquish her carriage, and in consequence, to discharge her old coachman, and several other servants, than the news flew with such unexampled rapidity, that on the evening of the memorable day in which the servants had notice, Bob received the following letter from his venerable friend :

Genal Johnsones Stables.

“ DEER ROBERED,

“allrow i aint Seed nothink on yu fore A
werry konsidderbell peerid off thyme sirkum-
stanhalls Is cum toe mi nollege witch korses
Me fore to feel werry fillisoffocle about yu kors
hive A inkellinashun fore toe think frum wot
hive eared yule bee throwed out off plaice if so
and yule kum and pig we me hit sharnt kost
yer a apney for nothink wile yer out and I des
say i kan get yu into somethink as soon As i
kan for beein out is onkommon heckspensyve
an noboddy dont git fat at It speshly as thymes
is werry rotten but wy Dont yu Do me the
onner off a korl hay kum there Aint no malliss
kum an letts ave a Drain toogether As we
yoused korse yu hare a goodd sort an i never
took yu fore nothink ellse so No more at pres-
sent from yure Werry pertickeller frend joseph
coggles.”

The immediate effect of this generous and gentlemanly epistle was to throw the whole of Bob's mental faculties into a state of confusion.

He read it again and again, with a view to understand not only the words, but the feelings by which they were prompted. It was the first formal letter he had ever received, and while it tended to raise him in his own estimation as a person of importance, it amazed him, for he had really entertained no suspicion of that which the venerable gentleman had intimated with so much distinctness. What could be the meaning of it? What had he done? He was sure that he had been particularly attentive of late. Besides, he had heard no complaint. Had any pernicious person succeeded in secretly subverting his fair reputation? Could it be possible?

As he sat in silent solitude, upon half a truss of hay, in the stall which invariably formed his studio, he weighed with the utmost nicety, the bearings of each conjecture as it arose; but having been thus engaged for some time, without being able to arrive at any really satisfactory conclusion, he started up with the full determination to ascertain what it meant, from the lips of his venerable friend.

It is true, very true, that in saluting Joanna,

the venerable gentleman had annoyed him, and yet, on serious reflection, why should he feel annoyed? What was Joanna to him? She had been kind, she had been friendly, she had made suet dumplings exclusively for him, and had prepared hot suppers almost every night during his master's parliamentary career, which was certainly very affectionate; but then, had he ever proposed to Joanna? Had he ever even led her to believe that he wished to propose? Nay, had he that wish? Decidedly not! at least, not that he knew of. Why then should he feel thus annoyed? He had no right to entertain any such feeling. He would be annoyed no longer! He made up his mind at once not to be annoyed, and having done so, he started off to have this deep mystery solved.

On reaching the General's stables, he beheld in one corner, his venerable friend, sitting studiously upon a basket, duly turned upside down, with a pen in his right hand, and the forefinger of his left upon his temple, labouring to turn a bright conception into shape, with an expression of the most intense thought.

The very instant, however, he became conscious of Bob's presence, he relinquished his pen, and greeted him in his usual affectionate style, by striking a pugilistic attitude, of a character extremely scientific and picturesque.

Having squared at each other with great ability for some time, they simultaneously seized each other's hand, which they shook with remarkable fierceness and affection ; and when these, and other equally indispensable preliminaries had been, to their mutual satisfaction accomplished, the venerable gentleman broke silence by expressing, with all his characteristic eloquence, the unexampled gladness of his heart.

" But Bobby, my Briton," he added, " wot's the matter atween us ? Friends vich is friends, shood never be onfriendly !"

" I'm not unfriendly !" said Bob.

" There you are ! the hold business hover agin ! the sum totle mounts ony to a misonderstandin, and cert'ny misonderstandin's is the rummest things alive. Vy, wot d'yer think the hold General did the

other day, now? I'll tell yer: two friends of hisn had a sort of a misonderstandin' about nothink: they was werry cold, and coodn't ha' told vy, if they'd bin arst. Werry well, wot does he do, but he goes to the basket, and picks out their cards, and then sends 'em to each other's houses as if they was sent by theirselves! Wot was the sconsequence? Vy they at once returned wot they both took to be the compliment, boney fido, and as each flattered hissself that the other had made the fust advances, and was willin' for to meet him arf vay, they met, in course, for all the vorld as if nothink had happened, and a reconcilementation took place."

"Well, that wasn't a bad move, mind yer," said Bob.

"It was hexcellent, cos they on'y wanted for to be brought together to be all right agin. And that's the case with all these here misonderstandin's atween friends. But it's all reg'lar now atween us? Eh? Give us yer 'and! Let's go over to the tap, and say nothink more about it."

To the tap they accordingly went, and after touching slightly upon the state of the nation, and two or three important political points which were just then at issue, Bob being impatient to have explained to him the various intimations contained in the venerable gentleman's epistle, produced that mysterious document, and having read it with due emphasis, begged to know what it all meant.

"Wot does it mean!" cried the venerable gentleman, elevating his eyebrows in a state of amazement. "Wot ain't you then seed your old missus's coachman?"

"No," replied Bob, "not lately."

"Vell, but do you mean to say you don't know there's a screw werry loose?"

"Haven't heard nothing of it."

"Vell, send I may live! Vy, the 'stablishment's going to be broke up reg'lar!"

"You don't mean *that*!"

"But I do, and nothink but! Coachman was ere last night as ever wos, to explain the ole business, and the peticklers cert'ny looks werry queer. He's got vornin'; they've

almost hall on 'em got vornin,' and from wot I can learn things is goin' hall to smash !"

" You don't say so !" cried Bob, whose countenance developed the utmost astonishment. " You stagger me regular. I thought they had a mint."

" And so they had ; but coachman tells me thish ere parleymentry business 'as kicked it all down."

" Ar, I thought they was going too fast."

" And so did I," rejoined the venerable gentleman ; and it really is amazing how prone men in general are to anticipate things when they have actually taken place, and how fully their conjectures then are borne out by facts. " It struck me frequent," he continued, " that they never cood stand them air evey expenses. But I'm werry sorry for it ; cos, from what I 'ear, your master's got nothink but wot he 'as from the old lady ; so if *she* goes, he must go vith her."

" Safe !" returned Bob. " And it hurts my sentiments very acute, 'cause he is a trump, and there can't be two opinions about it.

But what I look at most is missis, 'cause 'she is a regular good un, and I'd go to the bottom of the sea to serve her. What must her feelings be, mind you, eh? I don't think she knows a bit about it as yet; but when she comes for to be told, eh? Safe to break her heart."

"I don' know," said the venerable gentleman. "Vimmin genelly bears these rewerses much better than men. And it likewise makes 'em more dewoted. I've seen it frequent. Ven all goes on prosperous, they've plenty of scope to make theirselves onhappy about nothink, and feels theirselves at liberty to pitch into their husbands, cos, as they don't vont for nothink, they don' know wot they vont; but on'y let their husbands have a rewerse, and they're at once, all affection. Vot is it they voodn't do then if they cood! And if they can't get 'em over it, they'll kiss 'em, and make it seem better than it is, and try to persuade 'em not to mind it, and get 'em to bear up against it like men. That's the pint! Vimmin is rum swells to deal with."

“ I agree with you there,” rejoined Bob. “ But I say ! ain’t your principles on this here particular p’int a leetle changed, eh ? Didn’t you used to tell me, that when things went wrong, they’d pitch into you the more ? ”

“ Ar,” replied the venerable gentleman, whom the question had slightly confused, “ that’s ven they’re reg’lar hout an’ hout wixens.”

Bob shook his head. He perceived at a glance the inconsistency of his venerable friend, and being anxious to know the extent to which his opinions upon the matter had changed, he took occasion to intimate gently that he had an idea that the views which he had once entertained on the subject of matrimony were not precisely those which he entertained then.

“ It strikes me forcible,” he added, “ that they’re, in pint of fact, particularly different ; ’cause I, somehow or another, have a sort of a notion, that you and our cook is a managing of matters, do you know.”

At this moment the venerable gentleman

blushed—ay, actually blushed!—but on recovering himself a trifle, he smiled, and said, “Vy, Bobby, vot makes you think so?”

“’Cause she’s a continually sighing and talking about you, and looking arter the post-man, and receiving of letters, which is writ in a fis t very simular to yourn.”

Again the venerable gentleman looked extremely red. He saw at once that, in sending a letter to Bob in an undisguised hand, he had not acted with his customary caution.

“You write a decent stick, though,” continued Bob, playfully. “The i’s is all dotted, and the hizzards is very respectable.”

“I see,” said the venerable gentleman, shaking his head with great significance, “I see I’ve let the cat out of the bag. But it ain’t of much odds, cos I don’t ’spose I’m puttin’ *your* nose out of j’int?”

“Not a bit of it! Oh! it ain’t no odds to me, you know. Only all I look at is this,—she’s a cook, you know, and cooks is all war-mant, eh?—don’t you recollect?”

“And so they are,” returned the venerable gentleman,—“so they are, in common course of natur’; but Joanna is one in fifty million! That’s the p’int! I’ll be bound to say you don’t find another sich a cook in a day’s march!”

“She’s a good ’un of the sort,” observed Bob, cavalierly.

“A good un! I believe yer. There’s no mistake about her!”

“But however you come to be caught after all your experience, is a thing which gets quite over me. I can’t at all understand it. A deader mystery I never come across.”

“Vy, look ear,” said the venerable gentleman, with a philosophic aspect. “Did you ever ’appen to see an unexperienced young greyhound a-playing with a leveret, a-rolling of it over and over, and a-pawing it, and licking it, and not exactly knowin’ vot to do with it?”

“Can’t say I ever did.”

“Did yer ever see a kitten a-playing with a mouse, a-purring and singing to it reg’lar, a-

letting of it run, and springing arter it agin, vile the little onfort'nate wictim is arf dead vith fright?"

"Yes, that I have seen."

"Werry well, then, wot do they play vith 'em for? Ain't it cos they know nothink about 'em? Ain't it cos they never tasted the blood of them there animals, and don't know wot it is? Vy, in course. But let 'em jist valk their teeth into one,—let them have but one taste, and they're always then a-hankerin' and yarnin' arter 'em wiolent. And that's the case vith me. I never loved reg'lar afore: I never knowed wot it was to love; but now that I've tasted it, and knows wot it is, and finds it nat'ral to like it, I carn't never be 'appy vithout the object of that love, vich is her as I know loves me. That's the p'int."

"Well," said Bob, "I hope she'll turn out a regular good un"

"Safe to be a good un! Safe to be 'appy! She's the kindest and comfortablest creature in life. I never see her feller, and I've seed

above a few on 'em in my time, you know. She's cert'ny hout-an'-hout."

"Well, all I can say, you know is, may she never be anything but. They do, mind you, sometimes turn out queer."

"But you *don't* s'pose I've lived all these here 'ears for nothink! No, no, Bobby; hold birds ain't ketched vith chaff. I *shood* be blind if I couldn't tell wot a voman wos. I can see right clean through 'em in a hinstant. No—come, we ain' a-going to be done exactly arter all this 'ere experience, nayther!"

"Well, well," said Bob, "you *ought* to know a little about it."

"I flatter myself," returned his venerable friend, "I just do."

"Well, and when do you think about doing the trick?"

"Vy, that depends a little upon circumstantials. If your 'stablishment's broke up, yer know, as vell as the old lady's, vy, it von't be vuth vile for her to take another place."

“ No more it won’t,” observed Bob. “ But don’t it strike you as very strange that I ain’t heard nothing about it?”

“ The most singularest thing^s alive !” returned the venerable gentleman. “ They ought, at least, to ’ave named it, if they did nothink helse.”

“ But do you know, now, I don’t think it ’ll be so after all.”

The venerable gentleman admitted that such a thought as that might be entertained, but strongly advised him, nevertheless, to prepare. He then repeated those generous offers which his gentlemanly letter contained ; and when Bob had acknowledged, in grateful terms, the friendly feeling by which those offers were characterised, they pressed each other’s hands, had another pot, and parted.

CHAPTER V.

IN WHICH STANLEY RESOLVES TO RETRIEVE HIS
FORTUNE.

ALTHOUGH the news of the reduction of the widow's establishment travelled fast from Bob's venerable friend to the General's cook, from the cook to the lady's maid, from the maid to Miss Johnson, and from that young lady to the General, both he and Captain Joliffe, whom he subsequently told, deemed it a point of too much delicacy to justify any direct inquiry into the matter.

The first object of Stanley—when he found that all he had to depend upon was the estate, which yielded barely three hundred a-year—was to conceal the altered state of affairs from Amelia; and when he had taken steps to ac-

compish this, at least for a time, he devoted all his energies with the view of retrieving their fortunes.

But then how was this to be done? Should he enter the army? No; that would not do. Should he endeavour to obtain some colonial appointment? He had not the slightest wish to leave England; and even if he had, where was his political influence? He thought of a hundred things by which his position might be improved, but not one which was, under the circumstances, practicable.

At length Sir William—who had never allowed a syllable having reference to these embarrassments to escape him—became acquainted with a project by which he fondly hoped that Stanley might be involved in utter ruin. At that time several men of high connections—one of whom was by courtesy an Earl—having lost on various occasions immense sums at play, and being experienced and highly accomplished gamesters, conceived the idea of taking a house themselves, and putting down *sub rosa* a bank of their own.

This they fancied would be a most profitable speculation; and as the aid of Sir William, by whom they were all perfectly well known, had been solicited, he held it to be an excellent opportunity for sinking the remnant of Stanley's fortune, by inducing him to join them.

He accordingly lost no time in communicating with Stanley on the subject, but took especial care to proceed with the utmost caution. At first he mentioned it as a mere matter of news; but when he found that Stanley caught at the project, he gradually entered into the most minute explanations, and made the success of the scheme appear certain.

"Well," said Stanley, when the matter had been explained, "why don't you join them?"

"Why, you see, I have at present so much on my hands, and the probability is that it would divert my attention from matters which require a deal of thought. Besides, you know, I'm not a very speculative man; and these things, to succeed, must be entered into boldly."

“Of course nothing but strict honour is intended?”

“Why, the character of those who are engaged in the scheme would alone, one would think, be a sufficient guarantee against dishonourable practices.”

“Of course! But is it not singular that men of their character and standing in society should descend to enter into a speculation of the kind?”

“Why, the descent of itself is not very tremendous. The difference between playing against a bank and playing with one—except in so far as the profits are concerned—is but slight. They would not, of course, like it to be generally known that they were engaged in a speculation of this sort; nor would they, in fact, like it to be generally known that they frequented houses of that description at all; but in the abstract it certainly is as honourable to put down the bank as it is to play against it.”

“It merely struck me at the moment as being rather singular.”

“ And so it is. If it were usual, it would be thought nothing of.”

“ Well,” said Stanley, “ the idea is certainly novel. I should really like to join them.”

“ I should recommend you not.”

“ Why ?” inquired Stanley.

“ Merely because I think that it might occupy too much of your time. Besides, Thorn, when you play, it is solely for pleasure : now their sole object is profit. There is another thing ; they have of late lost considerable sums of money, which they are resolved to regain, and it is moreover necessary that they should do so ; but you are not in that position.”

“ Perhaps not,” rejoined Stanley, whom the reason assigned urged on the more. “ But when we play, as you say, for pleasure, is not profit invariably the chief object we have in view ? Are not the pleasures of play derived from winning, coupled with the hope of winning more ? Are losses productive of pleasure ?”

“ It certainly is not very pleasurable to lose ;

but that is an altogether different thing. Here we have a direct and well-organized speculation, the object of the speculators being to regain a certain sum. That their object will be accomplished there can be but little doubt; but then look at the anxiety!—what can repay them for that?”

“The attainment of their object! Now it appears to me to be the very kind of speculation into which I should like to enter.”

“Well,—but that which I look at is the necessity which exists in their case, and not in yours. Of course I’ll introduce you with pleasure, and I am sure that they would like you to join them exceedingly; but if you do, you must expect to be annoyed—at least I know that the constant settlements, the division of the profits, and all that sort of thing, would annoy *me*.”

“Very likely. But I have not, you know, so much to attend to as you have, which makes all the difference. When shall I see them?”

“Oh! we’ll go when you please—this

evening, if you like ; but I should advise you, before we go, to think the matter over."

" Yes ; that of course I'll do. Well, shall we say this evening ?"

" Oh yes ! I'll call for you. At what hour ?"

" You may as well dine with me, and then we can start from here direct."

" Very well ; be it so. I have a few little matters to attend to this morning, and while I am about them you can be turning the thing over in your mind ; but still, if I were you, I should say it would be scarcely worth my while to trouble my head about it. However, it is for you to decide. We shall again see each other at seven."

Sir William then left, and as he entered his cab—" Every man," thought Stanley, " knows his own business best. He has no idea of my real position. His advice, therefore, goes for nothing. He still thinks that I am wealthy. He has not the slightest notion that my necessities are as great as the necessities of those whom I shall join. It is hence

that he conceives that I shall deem the constant division of the profits an annoyance !”

Stanley smiled at this idea, and then proceeded to calculate what the profits of such a speculation were likely to be ; and while he was thus engaged,—with the gain of tens of thousands floating upon the current of his rich imagination,—Sir William, who was by no means so ignorant of the matter as Stanley supposed, was conversing with the projectors of the scheme, and representing Stanley as being a young fellow who had brilliant expectations, and would be an unquestionable acquisition, if they could but secure him.

“ But is he likely to be caught ?” inquired the noble Earl. “ Will he come in ?”

“ That I must leave entirely to you. He is to be managed.”

“ Has he much stuff in hand ?”

“ Why, it matters but little, you know, whether he has or not.”

“ His paper is good, of course ?” interposed “ Captain” Filcher, who had engaged to be the nominal proprietor of the concern.

“Safe as the bank,” replied Sir William.

“Then of course,” rejoined Filcher, “it’s regular.”

And so it was in his view, and also in that of the noble Earl, who expressed an anxiety to see Stanley, and begged of Sir William to bring him that evening, in order that he might at once be fixed, which Sir William promptly promised to do ; and they parted.

During dinner, although no word was spoken on the subject which Amelia could understand, Sir William perceived that Stanley’s views were unaltered. He was therefore in high spirits, and conversed with unusual animation, and studiously applauded every sentiment which Amelia advanced. His marked attention to her would, in the mind of a stranger, have excited suspicion ; but his freedom of manner and of speech had been so cautiously, so gradually assumed, that its progress had been to them imperceptible.

“I wish your mamma were here, Stanley,” said Amelia, on the table being cleared.

“Yes,” replied Stanley, “she would have been company for you while we are absent.”

"Then are you naughty people going to leave me?"

"Business, my love, business. I shall not be late."

"Oh! I anticipated quite a delightful evening."

"For my part," said the wily baronet, looking at Stanley, "I think we had better remain where we are."

"There's a good creature!" cried Amelia. "You ought to be recognised generally as the champion of the ladies. Is it of importance, dear Stanley?"

"It is, my love. I must go; but I shall return very early."

"Well, do not let me interfere with business. But how long shall I give you? Shall I say twelve o'clock?"

"Do not name any time, because I like to be punctual; and if we say twelve o'clock, I may stop till that time, when otherwise I might be home earlier."

"Very well; but return as soon as you can —there's a dear."

"You really are an admirable wife," said Sir William, to whom the gentle affection displayed by Amelia was wormwood.

"Now you are pleased to flatter," she returned, with a smile.

"No, upon my honour."

"Well, I appreciate your good opinion," rejoined Amelia, gaily. "Stanley ought in due form to acknowledge the compliment, seeing that he has made me what I am. We must ascribe all the merit to him. Admirable husbands make admirable wives—is it not so?"

"It is amiable on the part of those admirable wives to think so."

"Nay, but is it not so in reality?"

"The belief, I fear, is not universally entertained."

"I should say not," interposed Stanley. "The most brutal husbands have the most gentle wives; and, as you see in my case, the more mild and affectionate a man is, the more advantage his wife takes of that mildness and affection, the more she will tyrannise over him, and make him feel her power."

Amelia smiled, and was about to concede that, with the thoughtless and the vulgar, it sometimes happened that both husbands and wives took advantage of amiability and devotion; but as Stanley at the moment gave the signal, they rose; and on taking leave, Sir William pressed the hand of Amelia with so much warmth, that although she attributed it to nothing but the purest friendship, she felt an almost involuntary inclination to withdraw it. The effect, however, was but instantaneous; she bade him adieu with her wonted smile, and then embraced Stanley with the fondest affection.

Having entered the cab, Stanley, being impatient, started off with so much swiftness, that Bob—who had anticipated nothing of the sort, and who had to run like lightning for five hundred yards before he could catch the cab to get up behind—very naturally conceived that there was something additional amiss.

“Another blessed screw loose!” said he very privately to himself. “I’m glad he’s got somebody with him; although as it is, I must

mind what I'm at. In this here ticklish state of transactions, masters ain't very particular about gratitude ; and there's something a little extra o'clock to-night, I know !"

The expediency of looking out with an eagle's eye having thus appeared clear to his view, he leaped from behind with such amazing alacrity when Stanley pulled up, that he was at the head of the horse in an instant.

"Another blessed four o'clock business," said he, muttering with great caution, as Stanley and Sir William entered a brilliantly illumined club-house. "When every individual winder's in a blaze they pints to four or half-past, safe ! *Won't* you stand still ?" he added aloud, addressing his horse, "or am I to go for to make you ? Don't you think I've enough to put up with ? Ain't it ten times worse than listing for a soger ? As true as I'm alive masters now-a-days ain't got no bowels for servants at all !"

Whereupon he stepped leisurely into the cab, and having driven a short distance from the door, he adjusted himself snugly in the off

corner of the vehicle, with the view of having a few hours' soft repose.

On entering one of the private rooms of the club, Stanley was formally presented to the noble Earl, Captain Filcher, and two other dashing persons, who appeared to be highly pleased to see him. They had evidently been entering into certain calculations having reference to the scheme, the result of which had put them in great spirits; but no allusion whatever was made to the project for some considerable time.

At length, having freely conversed on the various topics of the day, and become thereby better acquainted with each other, the noble Earl opened the subject of the speculation, the success of which he described as being perfectly certain; and having dwelt upon the brilliant character of the anticipated profits, and proved in theory all that it was necessary to prove, Stanley became so satisfied that he entered at once into his views, and expressed himself anxious to join them.

The noble Earl of course explained how happy he should be to have him as a partner in the speculation, and as his title, independently of his gentlemanlike bearing, had great weight with Stanley, he felt highly honoured.

“And what will it be necessary for us to put down?” he inquired.

“Why, according to our calculation,” replied the noble Earl, “a capital of ten thousand will in all probability realise a hundred thousand pounds in three months. But we need not put it all down at once. Let me see; there are five of us. Of course we must expect to lose a trifle at first—it will in fact be expedient to do so. Now, I think that if we each of us put down five hundred to begin with, it will do; but, of course, it will be well, in order to make all sure, for each to be prepared with two thousand.”

This proposition was made to all concerned, and agreed to, and when the agreement had been drawn up and signed, they set aside all business, made an appointment to meet the

next morning at the house which Captain Filcher had partly engaged, and spent a jovial evening together.

On the following morning they accordingly met, and were all much pleased with the house; and as Filcher had had some experience in fitting up "clubs," he undertook to prepare it with all possible expedition. But Stanley was *in limine* puzzled. How was he to raise his share of the sum required? He could no longer draw money of the widow. Should he mortgage his estate? As this appeared to be the only way in which it could be managed, he resolved at once to do it; but as on the day in which this resolution was formed he happened to call at the club, to see what progress had been made, and found Filcher alone, his views on the subject were changed.

Filcher, who had received certain hints from Sir William, regarded this call as auspicious. He was therefore unusually anxious to win Stanley's confidence, and after showing him the furniture he had hired, and the tables he had purchased, and explaining certain mysteries

of play, he got him over a bottle of wine, and became excessively communicative and friendly.

“ I don’t know, of course, how you are situated,” said he, when he fancied that Stanley had been sufficiently warmed, “ but men who have the power to command a mint of money are not at all times flush. I merely allude to this in order to intimate that if you should at any time happen to be short, I have already so much confidence in you—and one can always tell pretty well what a man is—that I shall be happy to lend you my acceptance. But, mind, this is strictly between ourselves. I do not wish it to go farther, because in the present state of the world there are few men indeed whom I would do it for on any account; but for you I should be proud to do it, if such a thing should ever be required, to the extent of a thousand or so.”

“ Well,” said Stanley, who was struck with the friendly feeling displayed by Captain Filcher, “ I certainly feel flattered; and it strangely enough happens that I was just about

to raise a sum of money by way of mortgage."

"Bills are much more convenient. They save a world of trouble. They have but to be drawn to command the sum required, and when met at maturity the thing is at an end. What sum do you want to raise?"

"I thought of two thousand."

"Well!—I shall be happy to lend you my acceptance for that amount."

"But what security shall I give?"

"Your honour, Mr. Thorn, will be a sufficient security for me."

"But I think that every man ought to have some more tangible security than that."

"Oh, nonsense!—not among friends!"

"I should feel more satisfied."

"Well, if that be the case, give me your acceptance for the same amount. I positively refuse to take any other security from *you*."

This was kind, very kind, on the part of Captain Filcher. Stanley at least strongly felt it to be so, and inquired when the bills should be drawn.

"When you please," returned the Captain. "It may as well be done now as at any other time. Let me see—instead of having one bill for two thousand, you had better have four, you know, for five hundred each. You will find them more negotiable."

"I must be guided by you," observed Stanley, who at the same moment drew out his purse. "Can we send for the stamps?"

"By the by," cried the Captain, drawing forth his pocket-book, "it strikes me I've a lot of stamps here!" And it singularly enough did happen that he found just eight of the very stamps required.

"Well," said he, "this *is* extraordinary! I knew that I had some, but I had no idea of what they were. They will save us the trouble of sending out for them, at all events."

Stanley agreed with him perfectly in this, and offered to pay for them; but the Captain refused to receive a single shilling. "No," said he, "I am not a dealer in stamps. They are of no use whatever to me, and may as well be filled up for this purpose as not."

The bills were then drawn at two months. At the suggestion of the Captain, the dates were slightly varied. He drew four, and four were drawn by Stanley ; and, when each had accepted those which the other had drawn, they exchanged acceptances as a mere matter of mutual security.

“Have you any channel open?” inquired the Captain, when the exchange had been made. “I mean,” he added perceiving that he was not understood, “do you know any one who will discount those bills?”

“Upon my honour, I do not. I never had occasion to draw one before. But I suppose there will be no difficulty at all about that?”

“Oh! not the least in life. I’ll undertake to get them cashed for you at once.”

“I don’t like to trouble you,” said Stanley ; “but at the same time I really wish you would.”

“My dear fellow, don’t name the trouble!” cried the Captain. “I’ll do it with infinite pleasure. You shall have the cheque in the morning.”

Whereupon Stanley returned him his own acceptances for the purpose of discount, and having warmly acknowledged this additional obligation, left him in possession of the whole of the bills.

The next morning he called for the promised cheque, and found the Captain excessively busy with the workmen, who were engaged, under his superintendence, in decorating the principal drawing-room, apparently for some immediate purpose.

"My dear fellow," said he, as Stanley entered, "those things cannot possibly be done until to-morrow."

"That will do quite as well," replied Stanley.

"I thought that it would make no difference to you?"

"Oh dear me, no, not the slightest. But what room is this intended for? You appear to have been very expeditious in fitting it up."

The Captain smiled, and drew Stanley aside. "You have heard nothing of it, then?" said he, *sotto voce*. "This room is being adorned to give *éclat* to a private marriage. It will take

place this evening by *special* licence. Will you join us?—it will be delicious sport.”

“But who are the parties?”

“I am bound not to tell that; but you know the bridegroom. Say you will be here. It will come off precisely at eight.”

“But will my presence be agreeable to those most concerned?”

“Agreeable! My dear fellow, they will all be delighted. You positively *must* be here!”

“Well,” returned Stanley, “in that case I’ll come. But I should like to know who the parties are.”

“All in good time, my dear fellow,” cried the Captain. “But the thing must positively be kept a profound secret until the job’s done.”

“Oh ho! I comprehend!” said Stanley. “Papa is in the way.”

“Out, my boy!—for once in your life out! There’s no papa in the case; and what is more, my dear fellow, mamma will be here! At half-past seven, recollect, you will have the felicity

of being presented to her and the beautiful bride. You will not therefore on any account fail?"

"I will not. But don't let me interrupt you another moment. For the present, adieu."

"Adieu, my dear fellow! Remember the time! When you know all, my boy, you'll say it's delicious!"

"This is strange!" thought Stanley, on leaving the house. "And I know the bridegroom! Who on earth can it be? Can it be Wormwell? Very likely: and yet he surely would have named it to me at least! Well, it is useless to conjecture."

And so in reality it was; but his imagination was fraught with conjectures nevertheless. There was a mystery in the matter, by which his curiosity had been strongly excited, and that excitement continued throughout the morning unsubdued.

He was therefore, as a matter of course, punctual; indeed he was there somewhat before the appointed time, and found the bride-

groom to be his new friend the noble earl, who presented him at once to the bride.

Well, as far as the bridegroom was concerned, of course the mystery was solved; but in his view there was something mysterious still. The bride!—true, she was rather a beautiful girl, but she was evidently not a lady, while her mamma——Stanley *couldn't* understand it! He tried to converse with the bride; but “Yes, sir,”—“No, sir,” and “Very, sir,” appeared to be about the only original sentences she had the ability to utter. Her mamma, however, made up for all, by announcing it loudly to be her settled conviction that special licences were far more respectable than banns.

“Why, I say,” cried the Captain, when the hour had arrived, “where’s the *reverend* swell? Time’s up!”

“Oh, he’ll be here shortly,” returned the noble Earl.

“He is safe to come, I suppose?”

At this moment a carriage drove up to the door, and almost immediately afterwards he,

by whom the ceremony had to be performed, walked solemnly into the room. As he entered, he bowed profoundly to all around ; and as the bridegroom promptly asked him to take a glass of wine, he as promptly filled a bumper, and winked at the bridegroom, which Stanley conceived to be particularly odd. He remained, however, silent ; they clearly understood it, although he did not ; and the ceremony, without the smallest loss of time, commenced.

“Dearly beloved, said the reverend gentleman, “we are gathered together here for the purpose of joining this man and this woman. Wilt thou have this woman ? Wilt thou love her, comfort her, and keep her ?”

The noble earl answered, “I will.”

“Wilt thou have this man ? Wilt thou obey him, love, honour, and serve him ?”

The bride tremblingly faltered out, “I will.”

“Who giveth this woman to this man ?

The Captain took the hand of the bride, and gave it to the reverend gentleman, and when

he had transferred it to the noble earl, the ring was put on, and the ceremony ended !

Stanley stood amazed, and the bride's mamma observed that the ceremony, she fancied, was rather short, but suggested that it was in all probability unfashionable to have it longer, when performed by special licence. She was therefore quite satisfied : and having taken just sufficient champagne to cause her to be content with almost anything, she began to extol, with surpassing volubility, the prominent virtues of " my daughter the Countess, and my dear son-in-law the noble Earl."

The Captain then called for a bumper, and all charged.

" I give you," said he, " Health to the Bride and Bridegroom ! I propose it thus early, because I know that as they have to travel some distance to-night, we shall soon be deprived of their charming society. The health of the bride and bridegroom !—the bridegroom and the bride !"

The toast was duly honoured, and the noble

Earl in an eloquent speech returned thanks; shortly after which he, his trembling bride, and her delighted mamma, took leave and started in a carriage and four.

The very moment they had left, the reverend gentleman threw aside his surplice amidst loud roars of laughter.

“What is the meaning of this? inquired Stanley of the Captain.

“What! don’t you understand it?

“Upon my honour, I do not.”

“Then it’s no longer surprising the old woman was deceived. Don’t you think it was done admirably, considering our parson is not in orders?”

“You do not mean to say that this has been a mock marriage?”

“Why, of course! It was the only way in which that girl could be had! Mild and gentle as she appears, he has been trying in vain to seduce her in the regular way for the last six months.”

Stanley was so indignant on receiving this

intelligence, so incensed at being thus made a party to a proceeding so vile, that he rose on the instant, and quitted the house with a feeling of ineffable disgust.

CHAPTER VI.

THE COMMENCEMENT OF STANLEY'S SPECULATION.

To those who have been accustomed to view only the unamiable portions of the female character, as developed on the one hand by the restless scheming creature of the world, and on the other by the designing hollow-hearted courtesan, the mean, cowardly practice of defrauding a woman is sport; but by married men, who have studied the character deeply, and who appreciate those beautiful feelings by which it is essentially distinguished, that practice is happily held in abhorrence. Marriage induces a higher estimation of female virtue : it inspires men with a chivalrous, gallant spirit, of which the peculiar promptings are to those who never experienced the blessings which spring from

the gentle characteristics of an amiable wife, altogether unknown; and hence Stanley—he being the only married man present during the performance of the disgraceful, cruel mockery detailed in the preceding chapter—was the only man by whom it was not viewed as a jest. But although he was thoroughly disgusted with the heartless conduct of his new associates, he felt bound to fulfil the engagement into which he had entered, but from which he would then most gladly have withdrawn. He had no longer the slightest confidence in the men; he conceived it to be almost impossible for them to be actuated by any correct feeling,—still, having entered into the speculation, so far, he was unable to see how he could with honour retire.

Having reflected upon the matter for some time, vainly hoping for something to suggest itself whereby the speculation might with grace be abandoned, he named the subject to Sir William, in order that *he* might, if possible, point out the means by which an honourable retreat could be accomplished.

“I feel so indignant,” said he, after explaining the manner in which the mock marriage had been conducted, “at having, although unconsciously, been made a party to so disreputable a proceeding, that I declare to you I would almost as soon forfeit the money I have engaged to put down, than have any farther connection with the men.”

“Had you taken my advice,” said Sir William, “you would not have entered into it at all; but I don’t see how you can call off now.”

“Nor do I; and yet one might imagine that conduct like that which I have described would form a sufficient pretext for withdrawing?”

“Oh! you must not think for a moment of making that a pretext. Were you to do so, you would only get laughed at.”

“But do you not deem it disgraceful?”

“Why, I must say that, strictly speaking, it isn’t the thing; but in the circle, my dear fellow, in which *they* move, an affair of the kind is really thought but little of. Had he married the girl in reality, the case would have

been widely different—it would then have been considered disgraceful indeed; but as it is, being merely a nominal marriage, which may at any moment be dissolved, why, his family are free from the stain of a low alliance, and his friends look upon him of course as before.”

“Notwithstanding, he has utterly destroyed that poor girl by blasting her happiness for ever.”

“The conduct of men of high connexions must not, my good fellow, be scrutinised too closely. You must consider the peculiarity of their position. Suppose, for instance, now, that this had been an absolute marriage, what must of necessity followed? Why, his family, who would have considered themselves thereby eternally disgraced, would have cut him, of course, dead; while his friends would have spurned him for being a fool.”

“But this is no justification—”

“Justification! I grant you. But a family of this description would rather there should be five hundred mock marriages than a real one with a creature of plebeian origin, unless, indeed, she possess a mine of wealth. The

influence of affection or love in such a case is never allowed; they 'll not hear it. Rank or wealth, Thorn,—rank or wealth. No other influence can possibly be recognised by them. And perhaps it is as well that it is so. Conceive, for example, the absurdity of such an announcement as this :—“MARRIAGE IN HIGH LIFE. —We have authority to state, that the Earl of Clarendale will shortly lead to the hymeneal altar Miss Sophonisba Gills, the lovely daughter of the late Mr. Timothy Gills, for many years the confidential carman of the celebrated Jonas Carp, Esq. the *distingué* fishmonger of Billingsgate Market.”—Why it would throw every member of the noble family into fits, while the bridegroom himself would become the legitimate laughing-stock of the world. And then look at the position of the girl. Would it not be one of perpetual misery? Even suppose she were received by the family in question, their very courtesy would make her wretched, if even their sarcasms failed to break her heart. The absurdity of persons wishing to form alliances in a sphere far above

that in which they have been accustomed to move is really monstrous. As far as happiness is concerned, the ambition is fatal if the object be attained. They cannot be happy. Even their servants will sneer at the meanness of their birth. In a word, Thorn, the belief that anything but bitter mortification on either side can spring from a marriage of this character, is based upon ignorance the most gross."

"All this I admit to be correct," rejoined Stanley. "In an essentially artificial state of society it invariably is so ; and none but densely ignorant persons would dream of forming such a connection. But that is not the point—"

"Why, it proves that this girl, for example, as far as regards her happiness, is not in a worse position than she would have been had the Earl really married her."

"But it does not prove the conduct of the Earl to be a whit the less disgraceful!"

"Granted!—as far as that goes ; but it

does not by any means follow, that because men of his caste delude a lot of ignorant girls, whom they consider fair game, they should therefore be incapable of acting in all other respects with strict honour. As I said before, Thorn, I regret that you ever entered this speculation; not because this affair has occurred, for that is too paltry to be considered for a moment, but because I conceive that the profits, whatever they may be, will never be commensurate with the trouble it may occasion. As, however, you are in it, I cannot see how you can well call off."

Nor could Stanley. The disgust with which the heartless proceeding had inspired him was not in the slightest degree diminished; his confidence in the honour of his new associates had not by the arguments of Sir William been to any extent increased; still, jealous of his reputation as a man of spirit, anxious to be deemed by all a high-toned fellow, and therefore dreading the possibility of being suspected of meanness, or even of irresolution, he deter-

mined at once to go on with the speculation precisely as if nothing of a disreputable character had occurred.

In pursuance of this determination, he in the course of the day called upon Captain Filcher, whom he found most appropriately engaged in the honourable occupation of fixing an entirely new roulette table, the secret springs of which had been constructed with surpassing ingenuity.

“My dear fellow!” exclaimed the gallant Captain, as Stanley entered, “I am positively too glad to see you. I feared that something queer had occurred, you cut away so abruptly. You *should* have stopped. Oh! I’d have given the world if you had remained. We kept it up till daylight; and *such* sport! I thought I should have died. But how came you to leave us so early?”

“I was anxious to get away,” replied Stanley, “and I always find that the safest course to adopt in such a case is that of leaving without giving even the slightest intimation.”

“And so it is; but I am nevertheless sorry

you started.” Which was perfectly true. The sorrow expressed was entertained very sincerely, and moreover very affectionately, considering that he and a bosom friend had laid a well-conceived plan for fleecing Stanley to a highly respectable extent. “But I say, my dear fellow,” he continued, “those bills, now—I haven’t the cash for them yet. It seems strange, but the money market is in such a state. I’ve been about them this morning. Four-and-twenty bills returned in three days!—*that* tells a little tale! However, I left them; but if you have any channel, I’ll get them out of his hands.”

“I can do nothing with them,” replied Stanley.

“Oh! well, then, a day or two probably will be of no importance?”

“None whatever.”

“I always like these things to be done at once; but to-morrow, or the next day, I shall be able, no doubt, to get a cheque for the amount.”

“That will do quite as well,” replied Stan-

ley. "But when do we commence operations?"

"Why, I should say this day week. As far as the play is concerned, you see everything now is nearly ready; but there are rooms to be fitted up for the *Countess*."

"Will she reside here?"

"Oh! yes; and mamma is to be the controller of the household."

"Indeed! When do they return?"

"To-morrow, I hear; and some excellent sport we shall have. Did you ever see anything more admirably managed? Oh! the whole thing was capital!"

Stanley made no observation upon this, but directed his attention to the arrangement of the tables, more with view of changing the subject than of ascertaining what had been done. The Captain, however, entered into a variety of minute explanations having reference to the course they intended to pursue; and when he had explained all he wished him to know, Stanley left, with the understand-

ing that he was to call the next morning for the cheque.

On the following day, he accordingly went ; but the Captain had been still unsuccessful. He was to have it the next day ; and he called the next day, and the next ; in short, he continued to call day after day, until the time had been fixed for putting down the first five hundred each, as per agreement, when he mortgaged his estate for the two thousand pounds, and regretted that he had not pursued this course at once, without exposing his poverty to the Captain.

Having effected this mortgage, he at once expressed his sorrow to that gallant person that he should have given him so much trouble, and stated, that as he had then sufficient money in his possession, he no longer required the bills to be done.

“ I’m glad to hear it,” said the Captain, on receiving this intelligence, “ although I gave them this morning to a friend of mine, who promised to bring me the cash in the course of the day. But as it is, why, they had better be

destroyed. I regret exceedingly that I should have been unable to get the thing done without delay ; but you know what bill discounters are."

" I've never had anything to do with them," said Stanley ; " but I believe they are not angels."

" Angels !—devils, sir—absolute devils. However, I'll get the bills together, and see that they are destroyed."

Stanley thanked him, and was satisfied. Scarcely knowing the nature of bills, it never struck him that he himself ought to see them destroyed ; and if it had, he possessed too much delicacy to hint that he deemed it essential. That, in his view, would have been a direct imputation upon the honour of the Captain, which he would not have cast, even if he had thought of the possibility of the bills getting into circulation ; but the fact is, as the Captain undertook to destroy them, he thought nothing more about the matter.

The time now arrived for making up the first bank to commence with, and they met at

their own club, which they had named the European, and put down five hundred pounds each. The Earl and his friends, however, manifested no inconsiderable surprise at the unaccustomed promptitude of the Captain in this particular. They evidently anticipated nothing more substantial from him than an I. O. U., and, therefore, looked at each other with great significance when, on drawing forth his pocket-book, he put down ten fifties with the air of a man having the power to produce fifty more of the same sort at a moment's notice. It was held to be mysterious obviously by them all, although nothing was said on the subject at the time. The money was taken, the bank was formed, and the "European" opened the following night.

CHAPTER VII.

IS ONE WHICH THE LADIES WILL APPRECIATE
HIGHLY.

“Now, my precious,” observed Mrs. Gills, addressing the “Countess,” the morning after the speculation had commenced, “now your sperits is a little bit tranquil, you know, you must begin to look about you as a lady of title ought, and take care you’re not imposed upon, or anything of that; because now you are a Countess, my dear, you must do, of course, as Countesses does, and keep up a proper sperit and dignity.”

“Yes, ma,” mildly replied the Countess.

“Nor you musn’t be put off neither, my dear. You must have your own way, as all

Countesses has. *Insist* upon having all you want, and you'll get it."

"But I have all I want, ma, already."

"Nonsense, child!—truly ridiculous! Oh! don't tell me! You ought to have a separate carriage, and a box at the operer, and give a splendid series of parties, and all that, and have all the new novels, and harps, and pianers—"

"But you know, ma, I never learned to play."

"What of that? The whole world needn't know it. When you give a soiree, you know, or any thing of that, engage them to play, my love, as gets their living by it. Countesses never plays in public. Don't you know, my dear, that that's beneath their dignity? Never try to play, and then nobody 'll know you can't. There's no occasion to tell the world what you don't know."

"No, ma, nor more their isn't."

"Very well, then, my dear, then you don't ought to do it."

“ I won’t, ma ; I’ll always make believe that I can play.”

“ In course. And mind, never suffer them stuck up things of servants to address you as anything but ‘ my lady,’ or ‘ your ladyship.’ ‘ Did your ladyship please to ring for me, my lady?’—‘ May it please your ladyship,’ and so on. I’m not sure it don’t ought to be ‘ your grace’ ; but ‘ your ladyship’ will do for the present. Be sure and make ’em stick to that ; if they don’t, ask ’em who they are speaking to with their imperence. Mind that particular. Always keep them gals at a respectable distance : they are sure to take liberties where they can. If you give ’em an inch, they’ll take an ell, and you don’t ought to do it. Always know what is due to your dignity, my precious, and make ’em conduct theirselves in a way as becomes ’em. Look at that low vulgar feller, the porter. The ideor of bringing up the baker’s bill in his naked hand, for all the world as if there warnt a piece of plate upon the premises. And then look at that imperent thing, Susan. She’s always a-giggling

and going on. *I* see her, although she thinks I don't. What does she mean, I should like to know? Perhaps she thinks the situation ain't good enough for her. I'd give her a month's warning: she don't know her place. I don't think she's much better than she should be, my dear. Look at her curls! What business has a low common housemaid with all them there curls? Twelve pound a-year, my love, won't support that. Besides, she don't treat me with proper respect; and I'd have her to know, that although I'm not a Countess myself, I'm the mother of a Countess, and that, too, of as good a Countess as any in the kingdom. What does she mean by laughing, and sneering, and opening her ignorant eyes to the other servants, when I'm giving 'em the necessary orders? Does she think I'll put up with her low-bred ways? The insolence of such dressed-up things is exclusive. Either she or me must quit."

"Dear ma," observed the Countess, "don't drop yourself down to the level of her."

"*I* drop myself down to her level! No, my

love ; I think I do know myself better than that comes to. *Her* level ! I don't think I'd go quite so low as that, neither !”

“ Well, never mind, ma, I'll give her warning.”

“ In course. And very proper. I shall make a woman of sperit of you yet. But that, my darling, isn't all. You musn't let the noble Earl take no advantage of your inner-cence ; for Earls is but men, and all men, in this regard, is alike ; they'll all impose where they can ; and you don't ought to suffer him to do it. Assume enough, my precious. Begin as you mean to go on. There's nothing like striking the iron while it's hot. It saves a world of trouble, my dear. If you wait till a man gets cool, you'll find him very difficult to bend to your own shape ; but if you tell him at first what you mean, you 'stablish your dignity, and when he knows what he has to expect, why, he ain't after that disapp'inted. You take my advice, my love, and insist upon doing what you please ; there's nothing like it. A woman ain't a woman of sperit as don't, and

'specially a Countess. You must go out a-patternizing people, particular them foreigners as sings; and give blankets away to the poor in cold weather: it all tells, my love, to make a noise in the world. And when you go a-shopping, make 'em bring the goods out to the carriage, instead of going in; and when you don't want your carriage, have a footman behind you with a long stick, with a large gold nob at the top. Nothing on earth, my dear, looks so respectable as that; and the taller the footman, and the longer the stick is, the better. Besides, you haven't been to court yet; nor I haven't seen your name a single once in the papers! And another thing, the Earl hasn't once introduced you to his family!"

"Oh! ma!" exclaimed the Countess, "I should tremble like anything, I know, if he was."

"Tremble! Fiddlededee! Why should you tremble? You're as good as them any day in the week."

"Oh dear, ma! I shiver at the very thought. What I should do when I saw 'em I can't think.

I'm sure I should turn as pale as I don't know what."

"Pale, my precious ! What do that signifies ? Paint—all Countesses paints—and then nobody'll know whether you turn pale or not."

"Oh ! but I should feel so queer, I know I should."

"Rubbish, my love ! What's to make you feel queer ? Always look upon people as being beneath you ; there's nothing on earth gives such confidence as that. If you look up to *them*, they'll look down upon you ; that's the way people gets over people, my precious. And then there's another thing : where is your cards ? I never heard of such a thing as a Countess without cards ! We'll go and order 'em this blessed morning, my love, and have your court of arms upon 'em, you know, and all that. Nothing can be done, without cards. And then I'll tell you what we'll do while we're about it. Dear me ! now, how strange it never struck me before !—it will be the very thing—my love, we'll order a whole lot of

invitation cards at the same time. And then we'll get up a party, and invite all the other nobility in town; all the Duchesses, and all the Marquisses, and all the Earls, and all the foreign ambassadors and their suits. Oh! we'll have such a jolly night of it, my precious!"

"But will my lord like it?"

"There's not the least occasion, my love, to let him know anything about it until they all come, and then, oh! won't it be an agreeable surprise! But let's see—who can we get now to manage it all for us? It must be somebody that knows all about it, you know. There's the Captain; but I don't like that Captain: he's always a-sneering, and smirking, and going on so, as if we warn't as good as him, and a precious sight better. I can't a-bear such ways!"

"There's Mr. Thorn, ma!" suggested the Countess.

"Ah! he's a *nice* gentleman. He'd be the one. He knows how to behave hisself. Nobody can conduct theirselves more gentleman-

lier than him. He 'll manage it for us. I know he will, if I ask him."

At this moment Stanley was dashing down the street in his cab, with the view of ascertaining the result of the previous night's play; but as, on pulling up, he happened to see a person in livery at the door of the European, he laid the whip into Marmion with so much effect, that the animal, darting off in an instant, left Bob, who had got down with all his wonted alacrity, a considerable distance in the rear, before he had time to recover his faculties, the whole of which had been thus unceremoniously upset. Feeling, however, that he had not a single moment to lose, and being moreover extremely swift of foot, he, by virtue of making a desperate rush, soon overtook the cab, and remounted.

"Well," he exclaimed, "I should on'y just like to know what's o'clock now! There's something in the weather-glass, safe! As true as I'm alive, I don't know what's come to all the masters. It's my belief they're all a-going stark naked mad. Here's a mess—here's a pickle!"—he added, taking a retrospective

view of his clothes,—“splashed up to the very eyes!—a full hour and arf’s brushing; it ain’t to be done under. I’m blessed if it ain’t enough to aggrawate a bishop. If he didn’t mean to stop there at all, what did he make believe to pull up for?”

That was the point; and while Bob was thus occupied in giving expression to his own private feelings upon it, Stanley’s rage was unbounded; for as Venerable Joe was the person whom he saw,—but whom Bob in his desperate haste failed to see,—he leaped at once to the conclusion that the General, having heard of the speculation into which he had entered, had planted him there as a spy.

Such was, however, by no means the fact; and, in order to prove that it was not, it will be highly correct to accompany the venerable gentleman, who, after laughing very heartily at Bob’s rapid movements, and wondering very naturally what it all meant, was admitted between the outer doors of the “European,” when he sent up his name to Mrs. Gills, whom he had had the honour of knowing for a series of years.

Mrs. Gills, on the name being announced, blushed deeply as she repeated it again and again, marvelling who, in the name of all that was gracious, it could be, and bit her lips with due violence as she protested that the singular cognomen of the individual lived not in her memory; still she thought somehow she had heard the name somewhere—but where? Eventually by a miracle she recollected that there was a sort of person of that name in the service of General Johnson, a very intimate friend of hers, from whom, she had no doubt on earth, this person had brought some strictly confidential communication. She therefore directed the servant to show the person into the parlour; and, after having explained most lucidly to the Countess how essential to the preservation of dignity it was to repudiate all low connections, descended from the drawing-room with all the severity of aspect and stateliness of deportment at her command.

On entering the room in which the venerable gentleman stood, marvelling greatly at the fact of his being shown into a parlour, Mrs. Gills

reared her chin, and bowed with such surpassing grace, that in an instant he felt friendship freezing. He nevertheless approached, and was about to take her hand, which, however, she with a truly icy elegance waved towards a chair, and with an expression of sublimity desired him to be seated.

“Your manners is very cold, Mrs. Gills,” observed the venerable gentleman, who could not but deem all this deeply mysterious. “Have I offended you in anythink?”

“Oh, dear me, no!” replied the lady, tossing her head with a most superb air.”

“Oh! I thought p'raps I had,” rejoined the venerable gentleman, “as you seems to be werry much changed. I shouldn't a-called, on'y I 'appened to 'ear that Sophy was married.”

“My daughter, sir, the Countess of Clarendale, is married,” returned Mrs. Gills, with great dignity.

The venerable gentleman looked amazed. Could he believe it? Could he believe that the same individual Sophy, whom Mrs. Gills

tried so extremely hard to plant upon him was a Countess? He was about to take a comprehensive view of the matter, in order to ascertain whether he could really believe it or not; but Mrs. Gills interposed at the moment an observation, which rendered his imaginative faculties subservient to the influence of straightforward facts.

“As circumstances is so much changed,”—this was the memorable observation,—“and as you must in course be aware that there’s now a propriety as is proper to be observed, may I inquire your object in honnering us with this visit?”

“Oh! I on’y merely thought I’d look in to give Sophy—I mean the Countess—joy.”

“Sir,” said the lady, apparently quite shocked at the vulgar idea, “I’d have you understand that my son-in-law, the noble Earl, ain’t a mechanic.”

“I din’t s’pose he vos. There’s wery few noble Hurls as is. But can’t I see the Countess? I should like to see her.”

“Impossible. It ain’t because *I’m* proud,

no; but what would the noble Earl say? Why, he'd think it a disgrace to his 'scutcheon."

"It strikes me forcible," said the venerable gentleman, who felt rather piqued, "that half vot you know about 'scutcheons ain't much."

"Well, I'm sure! I'd have you to know I don't tolerate no insolence, and so you needn't come it."

"Oh! werry well, mum. But I must say, as a hold friend, I didn't expect to be treated in this 'ear upish vay."

"You may think yourself honnered that I saw you at all. I know I didn't ought to do it; but I beg, sir, that in future we mayn't be troubled by your calling any more."

"Oh! that you may take your hoath on. But as I remember there's a little trifle atween us of seventeen and sixpence, p'raps it von't be hinconvenient for you to settle without my summonsing on you to the court of requests?"

"What do you mean to insiniwate?" cried

the lady,—“seventeen and sixpence, or seventeen hundred pound seventeen and sixpence; it's all one to me! I'll discharge the paltry sum, sir, immediate! what do you mean?”

Mrs. Gills, being highly indignant, was about to bounce out of the room for her purse, when the folding-doors opened, and the Countess, who had been listening in the adjoining room, appeared.

“Dear ma!” she exclaimed, “here's a purse: but don't be angry with Mr. Joseph. You know he has always been kind to us, ma.” And she extended her hand to the venerable gentleman, who was about to receive it with the utmost respect, when Mrs. Gills promptly interposed her person exclaiming,

“My precious! What would the noble Earl say?—what would he think were he to see you shaking hands with a person in livery? Fie! my love, fie! I'm putrified to think that you haven't more respect for your dignity.”

“Well, ma, I'm sure there's no harm in shaking hands.”

“There is harm, my love! Gracious! what would the world say? What would be thought of you in high life? Why, you wouldn’t be received in good society! Consider!”

“My lady,” said the venerable gentleman,—for though it seems werry rum, I am still glad to call you my lady—I vornt at all avare as you’d married a Hurl, or I shoodn’t a-come; no, I know my place better; but I s’pose they vos havin’ a game vi’ me rayther ven they guv me your address, and said they thought I ought to call. Howsever, I’m glad to ’ear of your good fortun, and give you joy, and ’ope you’ll always be ’appy; but I must say your mother aint treated me vell; cos under the circumstantial, knowin’ her so vell as I have done so long, and bein’ always werry glad to do all I could to serve her ven she vos but a servant like myself, I do think that if heven you’d become the Queen of Hingland, she oughtn’t to be so stuck up.”

During the delivery of this eloquent speech, Mrs. Gills, with excessive *hauteur* was counting out the seventeen and sixpence, and

having done so, in due form tendered the amount. But the venerable gentleman disdained to receive it.

“ I’ll not touch it !” he exclaimed with magnanimity. “ No ; it aint that as I care for ; twenty times the sum don’t make no hods to me !”

“ But I insist !” cried the lady.

“ So you may, mum : but I ’d jist as soon touch a dose of pison.”

“ But you shall have it, sir !”

“ Not a penny on it ; no ; I vish you a werry good day, mum. I don’t,” he continued, addressing the Countess, “ mean any disrespect to your ladyship. I voodn’t offend you for the vorld ; but it’s a hold sayin’ an’ a true un about the beggar on ossback.” And hereupon, feeling much better in consequence of having made this observation, he quitted the house.

“ The low-bred creature !” exclaimed Mrs. Gills as the venerable gentleman departed.

“ But you shouldn’t go on so, ma,” said the Countess. “ People dont like it.”

“Of what importance is it to us, child, what *such* people like, or what they don’t like? You must know what is due to your own dignity, my love, or you’ll never be fit to be a countess. I declare I’m in such a frustration I don’t know how to contain myself. Oh, I only wish for his sake I’d been a man.”

Before the nerves of this amiable lady had become tranquil, Stanley having taken an impetuous sweep round the Park, returned with the full determination to enter the club, no matter who might be on the watch. Bob, however, allowed him to make a dead stop before he attempted again to alight, for he felt, and very naturally, that he had had enough running for one day at least.

“You look like a scavenger,” said Stanley, as Bob approached Marmion’s head. “Where did you pick up that mud?”

“A pelting arter you, sir, when you made believe to stop here afore,” replied Bob.

Stanley smiled as he entered the house, and Bob thought that his reply was particu-

larly pointed and severe, and he winked confidentially at Marmion on the door being closed, with the view of intimating to that sagacious animal that that really was his unbiassed opinion. "It strikes me I shut up his shop, then," he observed. "There's nothing like getting the best of a master. Directly they find out they're wrong, they cuts their sticks with their tails atween their legs, dead beat."

On entering the principal play-room, Stanley ascertained from one of the attendants that the bank had been on the previous night well nigh broken. He was also informed that the persons who had won, had signified their intention of playing that night, when, doubtless, the luck would be changed; and that it was deemed by the highest authorities politic to let a bank lose at first, in order not only to stimulate players, but to inspire due confidence by virtue of its stability being tested.

To this fellow's description of the extraordinary "run of luck" which had characterised the play, Stanley listened with the most

marked attention. The prospect seemed cheerless. Two thousand five hundred pounds lost in one night. His high hopes were depressed. It was a "Bear" account with *him*: and yet, why should he despair? Had not the Earl himself told him, before they commenced, that they ought as a matter of course to lose at first? Why then should he feel disappointed? He tried to revive his hopes by looking upon their depression under the circumstances as the mere result of folly, and having learned that his partners in the speculation had appointed to meet at eight, for the purpose of replenishing the bank, he was about to take leave, when he was formally summoned by the Countess and her mamma.

On entering the drawing-room, he was received with unusual parade. Mrs. Gills was particularly fussy, and hoped that he was well, and rang for the cake and wine, and most eloquently laboured to convey to him an idea of the delight she was sure she should derive from an early introduction to Mrs. Thorn. "Oh! do bring her with you, some day," she con-

tinued, "and let us have a quiet cup of tea. It will be so delightful, you can't think. I'm sure she's a dear nice lady; I am sure of it, judging from you."

Stanley smiled, and acknowledged the compliment profoundly, and said all that was necessary to convince Mrs. Gills that he thought her extremely polite.

"And now, Mr. Thorn, I've a secret," she continued,— "a secret which I don't want anybody to know on but you. I know I can trust you, and I'm sure you'll assist us. The fact is, my daughter, the Countess, and me, is a-thinking of getting up a party, for we finds it very lonely a-mumping here alone. Now, in course you know all about the other nobility, the Dukes, Lords, Wisecounts, Ambassadors, and such like; and, as we have never yet given a jollification, all we want is, for you just to put us in the way of it."

"I should think," returned Stanley, "that the Earl would be the more proper person to apply to."

"Oh! but we want to do it unbeknown to

him ! We want to surprise him ! to show him just what we *can* do. Oh, it will be so glorious ! You and Mrs. Thorn must come and meet all the nobility. Oh ! we shall have such a frolic !”

Stanley could not help laughing. He thought the conception excessively rich, and one which ought to be carried into immediate execution. Feeling, however, that he was not in a position to enter into the spirit of the thing himself, he advised them to apply to Captain Filcher, whom he described as being perfectly conversant with matters of that description, and who, he doubted not, would be but too happy to aid them.

“ But does he know all about the invitation-cards, the etiquettes, and all that ?” inquired Mrs. Gills, anxiously.

“ My firm impression is,” replied Stanley, “ that in a case of this peculiar character, you cannot have the aid of a more useful man.”

“ Oh, well, then, I’m sure I’ll apply to him. I’m certain he won’t refuse. But do you think he’ll keep the thing a secret ?”

“ I have not the slightest doubt of it,” said Stanley. Nor had he. He believed him to be the very man to carry out the idea to perfection; and, having explained to them how strongly he felt that the Captain would be delighted to serve them in such a merry cause, he received their warmest thanks, and departed.

CHAPTER VIII.

IS ONE WHICH GENTLEMEN WILL NOT CONDEMN.

As the bank was impoverished every night, notwithstanding immense sums of money were lost by the majority of the players, Stanley soon began to view the speculation as a failure. He thought it strange, that with the chances in favour of the table, and with experienced men for managers, the bank should so constantly lose; and that he did think it strange was not extraordinary, seeing that he was perfectly unconscious of the fact that the projectors of the scheme, through the instrumentality of confederates, were realising fortunes. He knew nothing of the villanous system pursued: he had no idea of knaves being deputed nightly by the two persons with whom the speculation

originated, to fleece the fair players, and to plunder the bank. He thought that, of course, all was square as far as they were concerned, and yet it struck him as being singular that their spirits should be raised after each night's loss. Instead, however, of thinking of confederacy, false dice, "despatching," and "secur-ing," and thereby attributing all to the true cause, he imbibed the pernicious, soul-enslaving doctrine of Destiny, and madly ascribed all his losses to Fate.

This made him wretched, irascible, and occasionally, although perhaps involuntarily, brutal. He was satisfied with nothing: everything displeased him: trifles, at which before he would have smiled, now inspired him with rage; in his sleep he would constantly start and talk wildly, and when awake, he would fitfully pace the room, with pursed lips and overhanging brows.

This change poor Amelia perceived with alarm. To her gentle spirit it was a source of deep affliction: it filled her heart with sorrow, and her eyes with scalding tears. She wept

bitterly, but in secret ; before *him* she assumed a soft gaiety, and laboured to cheer him ; and when she perceived upon his brow a more than usually dark cloud, she in silence caressed him the more.

Days of misery passed ; and whenever he returned, she would watch his clouded countenance anxiously, in the fond hope of finding his spirit soothed, but in vain ; still, fearing it might vex him, she never breathed a syllable having reference to his depression, until, finding her caresses repulsed as an annoyance, she became apprehensive that she herself might be, although unconsciously, the cause.

At first the bare thought of this being possible, dreadfully distressed her ; but on reflection, being unable to recollect any single act of hers at all likely to have excited his displeasure, she began to hope that something she had either said or done, had been by him misconstrued, feeling convinced that if that were all, she should be able, by removing the misconception, to restore his tranquillity.

Having dwelt upon this for some time, to

the exclusion of all other considerations, she resolved on alluding to the subject, and blamed herself for having permitted a mere misapprehension—for that she felt sure it was then—to continue in existence so long.

When this resolution was formed, Stanley was absent from home ; he had left to meet his partners by appointment, with the view of putting down the fourth and last five hundred each ; and as he had then made up his mind that the whole was irrevocably lost, he returned more sullen and peevish than ever.

As he entered, Amelia flew, as usual, to meet him, and when he had passively received her fond welcome, he sunk into a chair in the most listless style, and with a countenance enveloped in gloom.

“ I have something, dear, to say to you,” she observed, with a gaiety of expression which contrasted strongly with his dismal aspect,—“ something, my love, of importance. It is a question, and one which must be answered distinctly, too.”

“ A question ?” cried Stanley, peevishly.
“ Well, what is it ?”

“ Nay, do not be cross, dear Stanley. And yet, perhaps, I must allow you to be so until you have answered my question, and I have replied.” She then threw her arms round his neck, and while gazing earnestly in his face, said, in tones of surpassing sweetness, “ *Have I displeased you ?*”

“ Displeased me ? Nonsense ; no.”

“ Pray, Stanley, tell me. I fear that I have.”

“ I do tell you that you have not. Don’t annoy me.”

“ Dear Stanley, do not be unkind ! You have been for some time very sad, dear ; my heart bleeds to see you. I cannot be happy if you are not so. Indeed, my dearest love, if I have in any way offended you—”

“ I tell you again that you have not !”

“ Then what is the cause of your sadness ? Pray let me know all ? I can bear it, my love ; let it be what it may, I can bear it. Believe

me, I can endure with more fortitude the knowledge of the very worst calamity that could befall us, than ignorance of the cause of that affliction, which is unhappily so apparent. Do, dear, pray tell me all. Do not keep me longer in suspense. You kindly, fondly let me share your joys,—am I not bound to share your sorrows? Believe me, dear Stanley, it will to me be an additional joy to know that your confidence in me is unbounded.”

As a rebellious tear glistened in his eye, Stanley kissed her, and pressed her to his heart.

“ Bless you !” she continued, as she wiped the tear away. “ But I must not see that : anything but that I can bear. But you will tell me, dear, will you not ?”

“ My good girl, what have I to tell you ?”

“ Do not allow me to be tortured by conjectures. They afflict me, Stanley, far more than a knowledge of the real cause can, let it be what it may.”

“ Amelia, rest satisfied with this, that that

which vexes me is not of any permanent importance."

" I thank Heaven for that ! And yet if it be not, why do you allow it to torment you thus ? Come, be cheerful, dear Stanley ; it will be such a delight to me to see you smile again ! But I cannot be content with this assurance. If I had," she continued archly, " sufficient influence over you, I would insist upon knowing more : but as I have not, I must, of course, in the tone of a suppliant, beg of you to tell me all about it. Come, dear, as a favour ? I may be able to assist you. Besides, have I not a right to know ? Upon my word, I am anything but sure that I have not. It strikes me that there should be no secrets between us. I may be wrong ; but I incline, nevertheless, to the belief that a wife absolutely *ought* to know all that pertains to her husband."

" But even assuming that she ought, would it be wise, would it be kind on the part of a man to suffer his wife to be annoyed by the knowledge of every difficulty he has to encounter ?"

“ He frequently, I apprehend, annoys her far more by withholding that knowledge. When we see you depressed,—and that we can see, my love, in an instant, however much you may endeavour to conceal it,—the conjectures which arise, in most cases, create far more pain than would be induced by an actual knowledge of the facts. When you good creatures keep us thus in darkness, that we may not be afflicted by the troubles you endure, you little think that the kind generous object you have in view is not thereby attained. We are troubled by seeing that you are troubled; the very fact of your spirits being depressed, depresses ours; and although we endeavour to cheer you when dull, the gaiety we assume is *but* assumed, dear Stanley, and the assumption of itself costs many a latent pang. But, come, let me prevail upon you. What is the matter? It is true my reputation for ingenuity is not yet established, but a thousand things might be suggested even by me. Stanley, is there anything papa can do for you? If there be, let me know, there’s a *dear*! Nothing could de-

light him more than to have it in his power to render you assistance. It would give him, believe me, the purest joy a man can experience. Tell me, dear—do pray tell me if he can in any way aid you. You know not how he would rejoice in the opportunity ; indeed you do not ; but be sure that he would serve you with all his soul. Let me name it to him, dear. What is it ? *Do tell me.*”

“ Amelia,” said Stanley, regarding her intently, “ let us change the subject. Let it be sufficient for you to know, that I have felt, perhaps, far more annoyed than I ought to have felt. The affair will soon be over, and you will then find me as cheerful as ever ; but if you do not wish to annoy me, and I cannot think you do, you will not in any way allude to it again.”

Amelia’s lips were thus sealed, and the subject therefore dropped.

CHAPTER IX.

THE COUNTESS OF CLARENDALE'S SOIREE
MUSICALE.

HAVING explained to Captain Filcher precisely what she wanted, Mrs. Gills had the heartfelt felicity to find that he was prepared to meet her views to a hair. He was in fact, as Stanley had intimated, the very man to carry her conception fully out. He was in raptures with it. Nothing could have delighted him more; and so heartily did he enter into the spirit of the thing, and so promptly did he settle the preliminaries, feeling well convinced that before many days had expired the club would be completely broken up, and the glorious opportunity thereby lost, that he got cards engraved expressly for the occasion with the Earl's arms

thereon emblazoned, and all his plans laid down to absolute perfection, in a space of time almost incredible in point of shortness.

It became, however, essential to the due execution of these plans that the Earl should be temporarily absent ; and it happened most conveniently that, having put down his share of the bank, which was doomed to be the last, and just as the Captain had arranged to get him down to Newmarket, he announced his intention of going to Brighton for a day or two, ostensibly in order to pay a long-promised visit.

For Brighton he therefore started, and no sooner had he left than the gallant Captain issued the cards. He sent them to all the Ministers, to all the peers and peeresses in town, to all the ambassadors, to all the members of the House of Commons without distinction, to all the Judges and chief members of the Bar and their ladies, to the principal literary men of the day, to the Lord Mayor and the whole Court of Aldermen ; in short, he proceeded in such an exemplary spirit, that no

person of distinction in town could complain of being slighted.

It was to be a *soirée musicale* ; and as such was the case, he patronised the two most fashionable bands, and engaged not only the chief Italian singers, but all the native talent available. His views in that, as indeed in all other respects, were extremely comprehensive ; in a word, he was firmly determined to do the whole thing on a scale of magnificence not to be surpassed.

“ Now, my dear madam,” said he, having settled this necessary part of the business to the entire satisfaction of Mrs. Gills, “ pray what do you intend to give them ? ”

“ Oh ! they shall have such a capital hot supper,” replied the lady, “ and just as much wine, rum, brandy, and gin as they like to lay into. There shall be no stint of nothing. And then we’ll have some punch ; the punch alley Roman, I hear, is the nicest ; they shall have some of that. And I’ll tell you what jints I mean to have. First, for instance, there shall be a tremendous biled round of beef at the

top, and another sirline at the bottom ; a large plum-pudding in the middle, two saddles of mutton near that, a line of pork, a fillet of veal and ham, a turkey and sassages, lots of mince pies, a goose and apple sarce, carrots, turnips, taters, sparrowgrass, and every other delicacy in season ; and if they can't manage to make a decent supper off that, why, it *will* be a strange thing to me."

" It will be strange," observed the Captain. " I should say that they have not had *such* a supper lately."

" Is there anything else besides that you think we ought to have ? Because if there is, you know, Captain, we'll have it."

" No ; I am really unable to suggest any thing else. Your arrangements appear to be excellent. You must have enough porter."

" Oh ! they shall have *lots* of that. But what time do you think they'll be here ?"

Why, I should say that they'll begin to arrive about nine."

" That will do nicely. Oh ! won't the Earl be surprised ! But you'll excuse me, I

know, for I've got a world of business in hand ; but if you should think of anything more in the mean time, please tell me."

The Captain promised faithfully to do so, and Mrs Gills went about her business.

In less than an hour after that, however, certain of the noble Earl's family called, and on being informed that he was then out of town, the Marchioness, being resolved to have the matter explained, sent the card at once up to the Countess.

On receiving this card, the Countess almost fainted. " Oh, ma !" she cried, tremulously, " I never can go down ; I should drop."

" Rubbish, my precious !" exclaimed her mamma. " Why, what have you to fear ? She won't eat you. Besides, you're every *bit* as good as her."

" Oh ! I saw her get out of her carriage. The very look of her was enough. She's *such* a lady !—oh !"

" Well, my love, and ain't you a lady ? And can't you get out of your carridge ? I'll go down myself and see her."

“ Do, ma, pray do.”

“ Oh ! if she thinks to come any of her stuck-up fine ways over me, she’ll find I can give her as good as she sends. *I ain’t* to be frightened—don’t think it.”

Whereupon she adjusted her comprehensive cap, which was richly embellished with roses and lilies, and having completely satisfied herself that she *could* look fiercely if occasion should demand a look of fierceness, she tossed her head proudly, and descended.

“ The *Countess* of Clarendale,” observed the Marchioness, who was certainly a most majestic woman, “ is the lady whom I am anxious to see.”

“ The Countess,” returned Mrs. Gills, who tried very laudably to look as tall as possible. “ The Countess is rather poorly ; but I am her mother !”

This announcement had the effect of almost stunning the Marchioness, who drew back a trifle, and looked at Mrs. Gills with the most intense earnestness, while two of her sons, by whom she was accompanied, seemed ready to

burst into a roar, they enjoyed the thing so highly.

“ It is really very strange,” said the Marchioness, on recovering herself somewhat, “ that I should not have even heard of my son’s marriage until this morning.”

“ Well, it *is* odd he didn’t let you know.”

“ At what church were they married ?”

“ Oh ! it was done here by special licence !”

“ Indeed ! Can I not have the pleasure of seeing the Countess ?”

“ Oh, yes ; I’ll go and fetch her ; but she’s such a timid thing, you don’t know.”

“ Well, this is a start !” exclaimed one of the sons, as Mrs. Gills quitted the room.

“ *He’s* not married !” cried the other. “ *He’s* not such a fool.”

“ I only hope to Heaven that he is not !” exclaimed the Marchioness. “ But you hear what she says !”

“ Oh, I don’t care what *she* says. Depend upon it they are not married. But I long to see what sort of creature she is. If she be *anything* like her *mamma*, she’s a beauty !”

While they were thus engaged Mrs. Gills was endeavouring to prevail upon her precious to "come down, and make no bones at all about the matter;" but the Countess was still extremely tremulous.

"Oh! ma," she cried, "I'm fit to faint."

"The ideor!" exclaimed Mrs. Gills. "As if you expected she'd gobble you up! I never see such a thing! Pluck up your sperits, and bemean yourself like a Countess, as you are."

"Oh! but I feel so frightened, ma."

"What are you got to be frightened on? I'm shocked at you. Why ain't I frightened? A mere common paltry servant would have more sperit. You don't look as if you belonged to the nobility at all!"

"But I can't help it, ma."

"Exorbitant!—don't tell me? You should have a little more aristocracy about you! Come, come, my precious; come, take them there knots out of your hankecher, and come down without any more affected ways."

"I can't, ma: no, indeed, I can't."

"You pervoke me! I shall never make

anything on you. What is she any more than you are? She's only a lady of title like yourself! I never heered tell of such a thing! I'm ashamed of you, reely."

And having delivered herself to this effect she again, with due boldness, descended alone.

"My daughter, the Countess, says as you must excuse her," she observed as she hastily re-entered the room. "She don't feel at all the thing this morning. At any other time you like to come, she'd be happy."

Well! The Marchioness *could* do no more. She could not insist upon seeing her, certainly, although she much wished to arrive at the truth, and therefore feeling it to be useless to press the point then, she rose, and without any unnecessary ceremony, left the house, intimating that she was not by any means satisfied, and that she felt herself bound to see into the matter further.

As the *soirée* had been fixed to come off on the morrow, the Captain wrote to the Earl by that night's post, to inform that his presence in town at a certain hour was indispensable;

and, as he made it appear that his special command had been prompted by something connected with the speculation, that noble person duly arrived, and found his partners pretending—in order that there might appear to be a sufficient excuse for the summons—to be deeply engaged in a discussion having reference to the propriety of continuing the scheme.

Into this debate the noble Earl entered with spirit, with the view of proving the advantages which would as a matter of necessity spring from the very fact of putting down ten thousand pounds more ; and as it was then but eight o'clock, the discussion was kept up with warmth until nine, at which hour the company began to arrive.

The professional people came first, and were received by the Countess and her mamma with unexampled condescension ; but as the rattling of carriages continued, the Earl suddenly inquired if they knew what it meant ?

“ Oh ! yes,” replied the Captain. “ The Countess gives a *soirée musicale* ! ”

“A *soirée devil!*” exclaimed the noble Earl: and starting up in a rage, he rushed from the room amidst loud peals of laughter.

“What is the meaning of this?” he demanded on reaching the brilliantly illumined *salon*, in which the Countess and Mrs. Gills—dressed in all conceivable colours, and further embellished, in order to look sweetly pretty, with a greater variety of artificial flowers than ever adorned the active person of a sweep on May-day—were entertaining the professional people with characteristic dignity and grace,—“what, I ask, is the meaning of it all?”

“My noble lord,” replied the Countess. “We are only going to have a little party!”

“A little party! Are you mad?”

“But it’s the Countess’s own party!” interposed Mrs. Gills.

“I’ll have *no* parties!” thundered forth the Earl. “Why did you not let me know of it, madam?”

“We thought it would be an agreeable surprise!”

“Tom!” cried the Earl, calling loudly to

the porter. "Do you hear? Lock that door! Open it to no one! Not another soul shall enter to-night. What persons are these?" he added, turning to the Countess with a look which made her tremble.

"They are the singers, my lord."

"Dismiss them! I'll not have them here: they're not wanted."

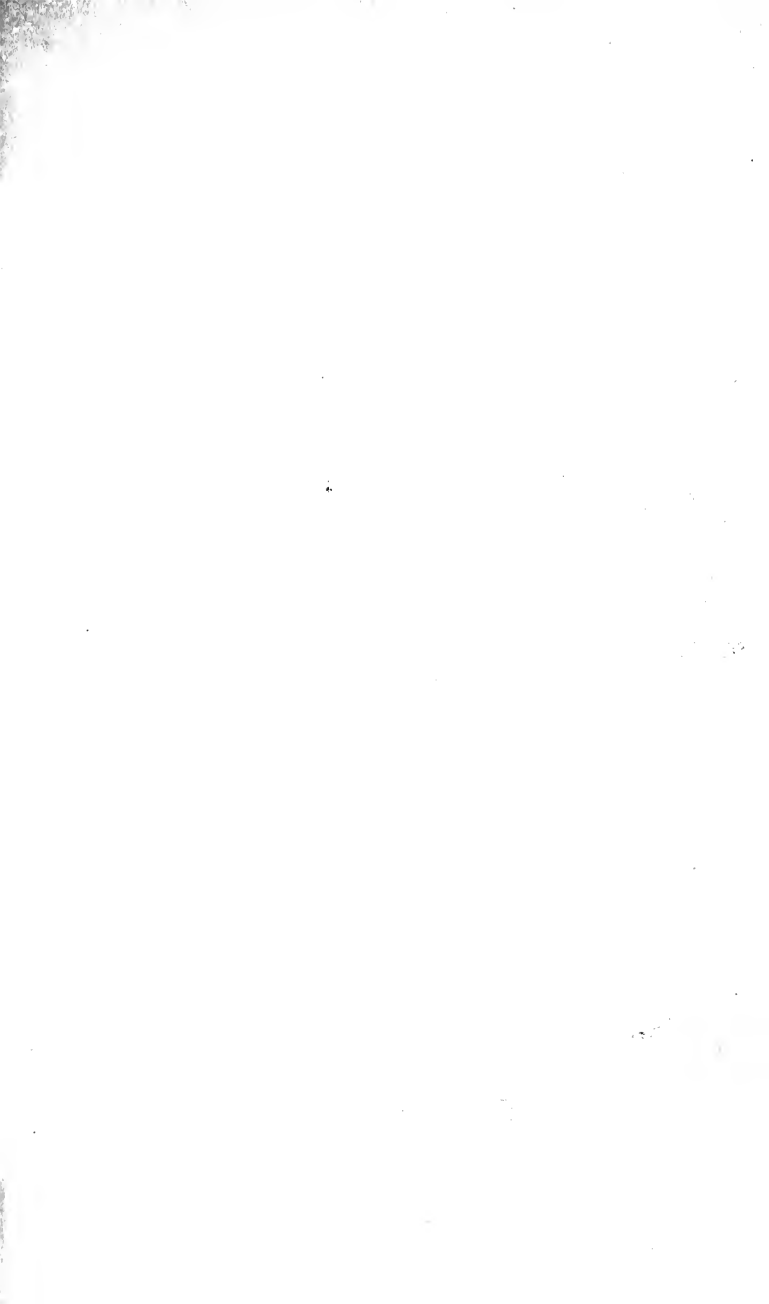
Whereupon he returned to his associates, who were all extremely merry, and demanded of them why they had not informed him of the issue of the cards for this *soirée musicale*?

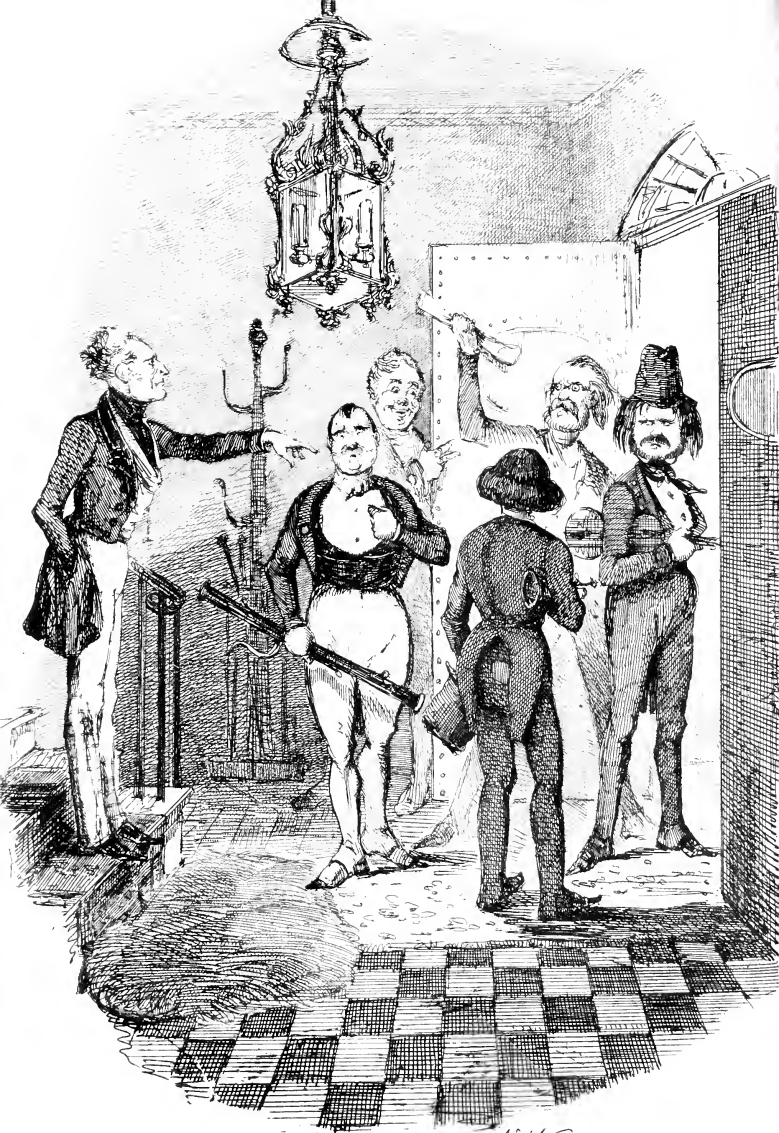
"We thought it by far too good a joke," was the reply.

"A joke!" exclaimed the Earl. "It *may* be a joke to you, gentlemen; but look at the position in which it places *me*! Tom!" he added, calling again to the porter as the knocking at the door became tremendous. "Never mind their knocking! If you let another creature in, I'll strangle you. Are those people gone?"

"No, my lord."

"Turn them out? Why do they remain?"





John Leach pict

The reason soon appeared. They had resolved not to leave the house without being paid; and no sooner was the Earl informed of this than he rushed fiercely up to them again, with a forcible ejection in view.

“I’ll hear nothing of your demands,” said he, “to-night. I insist upon your leaving instantly. If you remain another moment you will draw upon yourselves consequences which may not be pleasing.”

Several of the professional gentlemen here endeavoured to reason with him on the subject, but he would not hear a word, and exhibited such excessive violence that they eventually deemed it expedient to depart.

He saw them out, while Tom kept on guard, and then closed the door upon them himself. But the knocking still continued, for the street was full of carriages, and the whole neighbourhood seemed to be in a state of commotion.

“Wrench off that knocker,” he cried, “and then write upon the door.”

“What, my lord?”

“Gone to the devil!—to let!—anything!—run away!—no matter what!”

Tom mixed up some whitening with great expedition, and while the enraged Earl himself kept guard, he wrenched off the knocker, and marked upon the door in legible characters, “TO LET. GONE AWAY.”

“Now,” said the Earl, “let them thunder if they can. Snap that bell-wire!—snap it at once! I charge you, Tom, not to let another soul in to-night.” And having given this charge with violent emphasis, he quitted the house, leaving the Countess and her mamma sobbing over each other like children, while the Captain and his band were enjoying themselves highly, and making a *soirée musicale* of it, occasionally looking out upon the long line of carriages which continued to arrive and to depart with their loads until past one o’clock in the morning.

CHAPTER X.

THE COUNTESS OF CLARENDALE RECEIVES ANOTHER
LESSON.

THE Earl did not return to the Countess that night : but on the following day about noon he went to the door of the “ European,” at which he thundered as well as he could,—the knocker being off, and the bell-wire broken—until he became so enraged, that he sent his stick clean through the drawing-room window.

The Countess and her mamma were in the drawing-room at the time, and were dreadfully alarmed by the crash ; but they knew the Earl’s stick in an instant ; and while Mrs. Gills rushed in a fright to the window, the Countess mechanically flew to the door.

“ You have kept me here long enough, I hope,” said the Earl, glancing fiercely at the Countess, as he passed her. “ Are you deaf ?”

The Countess, being too much alarmed then to speak, tremblingly followed her noble lord in silence.

“ Well,” said he, on entering the drawing-room, and throwing himself carelessly upon a couch, “ a pretty mess you have got me into ! —don’t you think you have ?”

“ I’m sorry we’ve offended you, my lord,” replied the Countess.

“ For my part,” observed her mamma, who had by this time recovered all her faculties, “ I don’t see much to be sorry about ! Other Countesses has jollifications, and why shouldn’t you ?”

“ Jollifications !” echoed the noble Earl, sarcastically. “ I’ll have no jollifications. Look at the position in which you have placed me by making fools of all those people.”

“ Well, you know, my lord, you know that was all your own fault, and nobody else’s !

Why disapp'int the company? Why didn't you let 'em come in? I am sure there was everything nice pervided. It warn't as though we'd only a leg of mutton and trimmings!"

"Don't talk to me about legs of mutton and trimmings! Leave the room—both of you. I want to be here alone."

"Please don't be angry, my lord," said the Countess. "Indeed, we'll not do so again."

"No, I don't expect you will. I'll take care you do not."

"Upon my word and honour, my lord, I didn't know that we were doing any harm."

"Did I not tell you that I wished to be alone? Don't stand there chattering—be off!"

The Countess as she left the room wept; but her mamma, whose bosom swelled with indignation, looked at him, as she followed, with an expression of contempt the most supreme, and, in order to convey to him an additional idea of what she felt, she slammed the door after her as if she meant to split it.

"He's a brute!—an exorbitant monster!" she exclaimed, on entering the chamber to

which the Countess had retired. "But it serves you justly right for not having more sperit. I don't know who you take after, that's the real truth. You don't take after me ! Do you 'magine if he was a husband of mine I'd put up with it ? No : I'd see him blessed first ! I wouldn't take it from the best man that ever stepped in shoe-leather. I told you how it would be. I told you from the first how he'd serve you, if you didn't stand up for your rights. I've no patience with you, I haven't. You pervoke me to such a degree, I don't know how to contain myself."

"What am I to do, ma?—what can I do?"

"What can you do ? Why, up and tell him at once what you mean. Fly into a passion. The ideor ! I only just wish he was a husband of mine, I'd let him know what's what, I'll warrant. Do you think that *I'd* fret, and stew, and go on so ? No ! nor *you* don't ought to do it."

"But how can I help it, ma?"

"How can you help it ? Don't tell me ! Presume a proper dignity and sperit. He'll

tread upon you as if you was dirt, as they all will, if you let 'em; but you don't ought to suffer him to do it. And then the ideor!—did you ever in all your born days hear tell of such a thing as a husband being out all the whole blessed night, without even so much as mentioning on it! A pretty thing, indeed!—as if you had no right to know where he had been!—as if you didn't ought to insist upon knowing where he'd been! Do you think I'd let him have a minute's peace till he told me? How do you know where he was? And not a word of exclamation!—the ideor! But I see how it is: he don't think that we're good enough for him; but I'd have him to know that your're as good as him any hour in the day, if he comes to that. Aint you a Countess? and aint you consequentially bound to act as Countesses does? What does he mean? A very pretty thing! There! if I was you, I'll tell you what I'd go and do at once. I'd go to him, and I'd say, 'Now, I tell you what it is,—I'm not going to stand it, and so you needn't think it, and that's all about it. I'm 'solved to stand

up for my dignity as a Countess ; and if I can't live peaceable with you, I'll have a separate maintainance, and do what I like.' That's the way to bring him to his senses, my precious ! Whenever a woman talks about a separate maintainance, a man thinks she's in earnest, and draws in his horns. It's the only way, to up and tell 'em what you mean at once. Now, you take my advice ; you go down and look fierce, and tell him bold you won't have it."

"What, now, ma ?

"Yes, now. Make hay while the sun shines—strike while the iron is hot."

"I'm a good mind, but——"

"Do it ! Men is cowards when a woman's blood's up. If you cringe to 'em, they trample upon you ; but if you presume a proper dignity, they'll come down to *you*. Therefore do it, and make no bones about the matter."

"But I'm afeared, ma."

"Afeared ! Don't tell me about being afeared. What have you to be afeared on ? Give it him at once. Make believe to be in

a tremendous passion. Speak *loud*, my precious : there's nothing like that : they're sure to get over them as doesn't speak loud. When you speak loud, men is quite safe to speak soft ; in fact, they seems then to be almost afeared to speak at all. Throughout life, my love, there's nothing like giving it to 'em loud."

" But what am I to say, ma," whined the Countess.

" What are you to say !" echoed her anxious mamma, in despair. " Why, aint I told you what to say ? Give it to him well. Tell him you won't have it at no price, and so he need'nt think it. As true as I'm alive, there aint a bit of the Countess in you."

" Well, ma, I can't help it."

" Can't help it ! Rubbish ! I've no patience with such ways. Don't tell me you can't help it !—it's enough to make one sick to see so much affectation. Go to him at once, and tell him flat that you're 'solved to stick up for your rights."

" Well, ma, I *will* go," said the Countess. " I'm determined I will. I'll tell him it's un-

bearable, I will; and he needn't think I'm going to put up with it."

"Do, my precious. Be a woman of spirit. Its the only way in the world to get over the men. And don't forget the separate maintenance."

"I won't, ma. I'll tell him plump; see if I don't."

"That's right, my darling, give it him home! And don't forget to give him an 'int about stopping out all the blessed night, neither. Hit him hard upon that p'int; and if you don't frighten him out of his wits, it'll be very strange to *me*. Therefore don't forget that."

"I won't ma. I'll tell him he treats me very cruel, and that I don't care a single bit about him."

"And very proper neither. I shall make a woman of dignity of you yet."

Thus encouraged, the Countess boldly descended; but on entering the drawing-room in which the Earl sat, she was seized with so violent a palpitation of the heart, that she was perfectly unable to give utterance to a word.

"Well!" said the Earl, frowning ferociously at her, "what do you want here?"

The Countess tried to say that she felt that she was treated very cruelly; but as she could'nt, she burst into tears and left the room.

"Why, what's the matter now?" cried her mamma, on her return. "Has the monster been at it again? What does he say for himself?"

"He asked me what I wanted there," replied the Countess, sobbing bitterly—"what I wanted there!"

"Well, I never! And didn't you up and tell him?"

"I—could'nt—speak:—he looked—as if—he'd eat—me!"

"And what if he did? Why didn't you look as if you'd eat *him*, and then go ding dong at it with dignity? But I'll soon settle this—I'll soon let him know a piece of *my* mind, I'll warrant. He don't quite so easily, get over me!"

"Oh! pray, ma, don't go: he looks, oh! so fierce!"

"Fierce!—the ideor! Do you think I'm afear'd of a man! The ridiculousness of it pervokes me!"

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Whereupon she bounced out of the chamber, and the next moment stood before the Earl.

“ Now, I tell you what it is now, plump, my Lord,” she observed, with a dignified air ; “ if this here’s the way you’re a-going to treat the Countess, my daughter, it won’t do, my Lord, I can tell you : we aint a-going to stand it !”

“ Am I to be under the necessity of turning you out of the house, Mrs. Gills ?” said the Earl, with perfect calmness.

“ Turn me out of the house ! *Well*, I’m sure !”

“ You will compel me to do so, if you do not conduct yourself with greater propriety.”

“ I’d have you to know that I’m not to be ’timidated, my Lord. Where the Countess, my daughter is, there will I be.”

“ You had better be silent. I believe that I contracted no marriage with you.”

“ No ; I only just wish that you had !”

“ Heaven forbid !” exclaimed the Earl.

“ You’d have had a very different person to deal with, I can tell you.”

“ I know it. I do not require to be told.”

“ *I* wouldn’t have put up with one twentieth part of the treatment that she has put up with, poor thing.”

“ It is of no importance to me, Mrs Gills, what proportion *you* would have put up with.”

“ But *is* it proper treatment? Let me ask you that.”

“ Will you do me the favour to leave the room, Mrs. Gills ?”

“ If she ain’t treated better, she shall sue for a separate maintainance.”

“ Leave the room, madam !” cried the Earl, starting up, and pointing fiercely to the door. “ If I hear another word, I’ll have you instantly turned out of the house !”

At this particular moment, it struck Mrs. Gills with great force, that, as she was not the absolute mistress of that house, he had the power to carry his threat into execution ; and as she felt it to be, therefore, inexpedient to provoke the tyrannical exercise of that power, she most reluctantly held her peace, and left the room, as she subsequently expressed it, “ fit to bust.”

“ Well, ma” cried the Countess, who was naturally anxious to know the result, “ how *did* you get on ? What on earth *did* he say ?”

“ He’s a brute ! I’m putrified, my precious ! I *never* in all my days heard of such a monster ! Would you believe it ?—why, he threatened to turn me out of the house, he did !—actually neck and crop out of the house !”

“ Lor, ma ! you don’t say so !”

“ It’s a fact ! But I’d have him to know that I’m as good as him, if he comes to that, and ain’t a-going to tolerate such ways with impunity.”

“ But how did it come about, ma ?”

“ I’ll tell you—but I feel so wild, I scarce know how to contain myself. Turn me out of the house, indeed !—a very fine ideor ! ‘ In the first place,’ says I, ‘ my Lord, this is all about it : the Countess, my daughter,’ says I, ‘ aint a-going to stand any more of your nonsense, and so,’ says I, ‘ you needn’t try it on.’”

“ Lor, ma ! reely you shouldn’t have said that.”

“ Oh ! there’s nothing like giving ’em as good as they send. I aint lived all these years

without knowing what I'm about. However, says he, 'What do you mean,' says he. 'What do I *mean*?' says I, 'I'll tell you what I mean: I mean what I say,' says I, neither better nor worse. 'Am I to kick you head first out of the house?' says he. 'Kick me out of the house!' says I, 'How many on you? I should only like to see you,' says I, 'a-kicking me out of the house. I'd cure you of kicking for the rest of your days,' says I."

"Lor! you didn't ought to have gone on so."

"Oh! don't tell me. It showed him, at any rate, I wasn't afeared. 'Kick me out,' says I, 'will you? You're a nice man, I don't think, to talk about kicking.' 'I'll do it,' says he, 'if you don't hold your noise.' 'You will,' says I, 'will you? Do it—at your perel!' 'I didn't marry you,' says he. 'No,' says I; 'I only just wish,' says I, 'for your sake, you had. I'll warrant,' says I, 'I'd let you a-knowed the difference!' So with that we went right at it, hammer and tongs. But I soon cowed him down—I soon gave him to know that *I* warn't to be frightened."

“Oh dear! I’m very sorry you said anything to him.”

“Oh! rubbish about being sorry. There’s nothing like telling ’em plump what you mean. Is he to treat you in this here scandalous way without having a syllable said to him? His lawful wife too, and a Countess! *You* ought to go in. *I* don’t ought to do it. You ought to up and tell him right flat you won’t have it, and let him talk about turning you out, if he dare. A pretty thing, indeed! Why, what did you marry him for?”

“I wish I never married him at all, ma, that I do. I’m very unhappy.”

“And likely to remain unhappy, too, unless you show a proper sperit. Do you think, if I was a Countess, I wouldn’t act different? I’d give him to know I’d do just what I liked, and give just what jollifications I liked. Does he imagine that you’re to be moped up here without displaying no dignity? Does he suppose that you’re to have *no* company, no parties, no frolics? Why, had you married a common tradesman, you’d been better off.

Stick up for your rights, my precious, and don't be imposed upon by nobody. 'That's the only way. It's out of all character that you should be muddled up here, and have no sort of pleasure, no sort of society, nor nothing of that. It's enough to drive any woman stark staring mad! What's the good of being a Countess, if you don't do as countesses does? What's the good of having a title, if you don't keep up your dignity? 'That's my sentiments. It astonishes my intellects to see you submit to be treated like the common scum of the earth. It's incredulous to me that you should suffer yourself to be put upon like that. Why, if I was you, I'd turn the house out of the windows. *I'd* see who was misses, I'll warrant. And depend upon it, that's the only way. You haven't half enough of sperit, you don't ought to let him keep you thus under his thumb. If you do it now, what'll it be by and by? 'That's the point: that's what you ought to consider. I never in all my days heared of such a thing as a Countess being treated like you. Where's your pride?

You don't seem to have got a mite in you. I don't understand it. It gets over me altogether. I've no patience with you : I haven't, as true as I'm alive !"

While the Countess was being thus lectured by her mamma, who was earnestly anxious to inspire her soul with due dignity, the Earl and Captain Filcher—of whose arrival the ladies knew nothing—were dividing the profits of their late speculation, and arranging the preliminaries of a certain transfer, the character of which will be duly explained anon.

CHAPTER XI.

STANLEY'S PECUNIARY EMBARRASMENTS

COMMENCE.

THE two thousand pounds for which Stanley had mortgaged his estate being lost, his actual income was reduced to something less than two hundred a-year ; and as he continued to live at the rate of a thousand, he soon of course found himself embarrassed.

Still the tradesmen whom he patronised did not for some time annoy him : they believed him to be rich, and were therefore with infinite pleasure prepared to give him credit to any amount, notwithstanding their regular bills were unpaid.

This did not, however, last long. In less than two months they began to be importunate. *One* had a very heavy bill to take up on a certain

day; another happened at the time to be dreadfully pressed; a third remembered by a miracle that his commodities bore only a ready-money profit; a fourth became suddenly so circumstanced, that he every day expected a man to be put in possession; while a fifth had decidedly a couple of executions in his house at that particular crisis; and thus they went on, inventing fresh falsehoods daily, and making it appear that they were then in such terrible trouble, that their commercial salvation depended upon Stanley, inasmuch as that, unless these identical "little bills" were immediately settled, the Gazette would be the inevitable portion of them all.

To Stanley these annoyances were galling in the extreme. He felt deeply humiliated. His inability to pay sums so paltry mortified him more than if the total had been twenty times doubled in one amount. The thing was altogether new to him. He knew not how to act. Had he been, as many thousands are, accustomed to these petty perplexities, the necessity for either bearing up against them, or

exerting himself with the view of getting rid of them at once, would have appeared to be absolute; but as he had never been in any way pressed before, his spirit seemed broken, and he became irresolute and inactive.

Poor Amelia—from whom the widow's embarrassments had been so effectually concealed, that she knew only that the carriage had been dispensed with—could not understand this altered state of things at all. At that period she had had no money from Stanley for a month; but having taken care of a small sum she possessed at the time of her marriage, she had been able to pay for those articles for which immediate payment was required, while perceiving how much the importunities of those tradesmen who had given them credit annoyed him, she endeavoured, as much as possible, to withhold from him all knowledge of the abrupt and threatening manner in which they made their demands. When, however, the whole of her money had been expended, and the creditors, who had previously displayed the most cringing servility, had become not only cla-

morous but insolent, she felt it to be her duty to mention the subject to him that she might know the real cause of their not being paid.

“Stanley,” she observed, taking advantage of a moment in which he appeared to be somewhat more tranquil than usual, “those persons are beginning to get *very* impatient.”

“What persons?” demanded Stanley.

“Those tradesmen, dear, who have sent in their bills. They called again this morning.”

“Let them call. They must wait.”

“But they say that they will *not* wait, my love!”

“But I say they *must*! What do they mean? Are they afraid of losing their money?”

“Why, it would seem that they were, for the tone they have assumed of late is really very harsh and insulting.”

“Insulting!” echoed Stanley. “I’ll kick them to the devil!”

“Do not be rash, dear Stanley. They are

perhaps, very poor. But why do you not pay them at once?"

"They shall wait now for their insolence."

"But were it not better, dear, to settle their accounts, and then to show them that you are displeased with their want of confidence in you by dealing with them no more?"

"I shall do so when I find it quite convenient; but certainly not until then."

"But the fact of its being at present inconvenient is a matter of the slightest possible importance! I can easily get sufficient money to pay them!"

"Of whom?"

"Oh! I can get it of mamma!"

"Have you ever," demanded Stanley regarding her with sternness,—“have you ever named the subject to *her*?"

"Never, Stanley! No dear, never!" replied Amelia; "I would not do so for the world, my love, without your permission."

"Very well. In that quarter never let it be named."

“ But what possible objection can you have, dear. I really can see none myself.”

“ I have an objection—a very great objection; one which is perfectly insurmountable.”

“ Of course, my love, you are the best judge; but do you know, my impression is, that you are far too delicate, Stanley !”

“ I would not have it known that I am short down at Richmond, for ten thousand pounds !”

“ Oh ! you proud creature !” exclaimed Amelia, with a smile. “ And yet are you proud, Stanley ? Let me bring you to the test, that we may see if that really be pride which looks so very much like it. Stanley !” she continued, with much earnestness, “ the servants—our servants ! It cannot be kept from them.”

“ I’ll discharge the first that dares to hold the slightest communication with these people.”

“ It cannot be prevented, my love. They will talk : they will canvass matters of this

description; they will form their own conjectures; they will swell the lightest word into an affair of vast importance. Believe me, I tremble whenever I hear a single knock at the door,—I do indeed, my dear, and would answer all such knocks myself, were it not for very shame.”

“I wish to heaven you would not trouble yourself about such things at all.”

“I cannot help it: indeed I cannot help it. Did you but know what I suffer, when I hear those persons in the hall asking the servants the most impertinent questions, and leaving messages of the most insolent and menacing character, you would pity me.”

“Why did you not tell me of all this before?”

“Because I well knew, my love, that it would vex you; and as I fully expected that you would very soon be able to meet their demands, I have concealed it from you, hoping that the annoyance would cease without causing you any additional mortification. But, be assured, dear Stanley, that I do not speak thus

for myself. Although it afflicts me deeply to hear you spoken of by those persons in terms so unwarrantable and harsh, I am not anxious for the immediate discharge of these debts merely as a matter of comfort as far as I am concerned ; my chief object in bringing the subject forward, is to put it to you whether it would not be in every point of view far better to allow me to get—say to borrow—a certain sum of money of mamma, than to promote the circulation of those rumours which absolutely strike at the purity of your motives ?”

“ Oh, let them circulate what rumours they please ! they cannot injure me.”

“ But, Stanley dear, would it not be better to allow me to do at once that which I propose, than to suffer your importance to be diminished, not only in the estimation of those tradesmen, but also in the eyes of our servants ? Consider, my love. What if mamma should know that you are at present somewhat pressed ? Nay, if even my father were informed of the fact, of what possible consequence could it be ? But he need not know anything about it.”

“ It shall not be known to either.”

“Well, then,” continued Amelia, “let me suggest another course. But you will not be angry with me? Promise that you will not be angry if I offer another suggestion?”

“Well, I do promise: what is it?”

“Have you not heard, dear, of persons—persons, too, moving in high society, who, whenever they need temporary loans, can obtain them by depositing articles of value as security for repayment?”

“I have,” replied Stanley.

“Well, dear, then why cannot we do the same? Those jewels of mine (you know I very seldom wear them); I have no idea how much they cost, but I should say they are worth five times the sum we require to pay all these tiresome people. Why not deposit *them*?”

“You are a good girl,” said Stanley: “but there will be no necessity for anything of the kind.”

“Take them, dear Stanley!” continued Amelia. “Do let me prevail upon you to take them; or tell me where to go, and I will take them myself. I should not be ashamed, dear;

indeed I should not be ashamed !” But as she spoke, the tears trickled down her beautiful cheeks ; which, however, she tried to conceal.

“ Oh, that will not be required,” replied Stanley.

“ But Lady Dashwell *always* went herself. She took hers to a goldsmith in Oxford Street, I have heard. Come, dear, let me take mine, and then all these annoyances will be at an end.”

“ Why, Amelia, I am not a beggar ! I ’ll go and get the money of my mother at once. I *can* do so ; but the necessity for it never before appeared to be so pressing.”

“ Then you forgive me, dear Stanley ?”

“ *Forgive* you !”

He embraced her, and left her comparatively happy. She did not expect that he would have been so calm, although it was manifest, even to her, that his naturally impetuous spirit was being by some process gradually subdued.

On reaching the widow’s residence, Stanley found her sitting in solitude at the drawing-

room window, envying the owner of every carriage that passed, and conceiving it to be by far the greatest luxury under heaven. She had no carriage; and the thought of this formed her chief affliction. She felt that she could with fortitude have endured the loss of anything but that; which was certainly nothing but natural, seeing that the things which we have *will* appear very poor when compared with the things we have not.

“Mother,” said Stanley as he took a seat beside her, “have you any money at your banker’s?”

This question amazed the widow much. The tone was so excessively novel. It had theretofore been invariably, “Mother! I *want* some money, and *must have* it; and if you haven’t got it, you must *get* it!” Her amazement may hence be understood.

“Why, my love,” she replied, on recovering herself somewhat, “I have a little.”

“I wish you’d lend me some for a short time,” said Stanley. “You shall have it again.”

“Certainly, my dear. How much do you want?”

“How much can you spare?”

“Why, I scarcely know, my love. Will twenty or thirty pounds be enough?”

“I wish you could let me have a hundred.”

“A hundred pounds, my dear, is a large sum to me now!”

“I know it, mother: I know it. You need not remind me of that. The question is, *can* you let me have it? I am pestered to death by a parcel of petty people, whom I am anxious to pay.”

“Well—well, you shall have it. But be cautious, my Stanley,—for Heaven’s sake be cautious, there’s a dear! I dare say, my love, that you do the best you can; and I know it to be very distressing to retrench; but the necessity for living within your income, limited as it is, dear, must not be overlooked.”

“I know, mother—I know all about it. Just give me a cheque.”

“I have been thinking, dear,” continued the widow, as she very slowly opened her desk,

“ I have been thinking—and it’s strange that it never struck me till this morning—that if we were to live together, dear, in one house, you know, so that we should have to support but one establishment, we should be able to live in better style, besides being——”

“ Yes—yes,” interposed Stanley, with impatience. “ We ’ll talk about that another time. I ’ll see about it. Let me have the cheque.

The cheque was accordingly drawn, and when he had taken leave hastily, although with somewhat more affection than usual, he proceeded to the banker’s without delay.

CHAPTER XII.

IN WHICH THE VENERABLE GENTLEMAN APPEARS
JUST ON THE VERGE.

As Amelia had conjectured, the constant applications of the tradesmen for the settlement of their accounts formed the principal topic of conversation among the servants. They felt perfectly sure that the establishment was about to be broken up ; and as the gentle Joanna conceived it to be her duty to relate all the particulars to her venerable friend, the day was named for the consummation of their bliss exactly three hours after Stanley had made the heart of poor Amelia glad by placing the entire hundred pounds in her hand to be appropriated to the purposes for which it was obtained.

It may also be stated as a remarkable coincidence, that Bob—whose spirits were governed by Amelia as absolutely as the thermometer is

governed by the air, was on that very evening unusually gay. He had been to the banker's with his master; he had seen his mistress on his return; he had seen her twice, and well knew, by the joyful expression of her countenance, that a favourable change had taken place.

When, therefore, he entered the kitchen in which the blooming Joanna and her venerable friend were sitting *tête-à-tête* with very great affection, he exclaimed in the joy of his heart, "Now I don't care a dump! It's all right! I know it is by missis! Blest if I mind standing a couple of pots of arf and-arf!"

"Vot! 'ave you got yer vages?" inquired the venerable gentleman.

"No; but I shall get 'em, safe. But that ain't what I look at. I warn't even thinking of them. I know it's all right now with master; that's all I care for. I know it by missis's looks. I'll bet ten to one on it, brandies and waters. She can't deceive me."

"Looks is werry deceptive," observed the venerable gentleman. "It's a werry old

sayin', and a true un, that you mustn't take people by their looks."

"Oh, but missis is one which can't be mistaken. Let me look in her face, and I know what 's o'clock. I can tell in an instant. There ain't a ha'p'orth of any mistake about *her*."

"But ain't you got nothink else in this case to go by?"

"Yes; but that, and nothing else, would be plenty for me. But there is something else. We went out about four o'clock all in a hurry, and drove to old missis's house. Well, master went in with his tail very low—I never see a man much more downer in the mouth; but he hadn't been there long before he came out, and pelted right down to the banker's. Well, I knew there was something rayther extra in the wind, so I watched him; and when he came out, *p'r'aps* he warn't a little altered! I never see such a change in a man in my life! Well, he got in, and cut back; and when he pulled up at the door missis was on the *quivy*, as the French says, at the window; and the minit she

see him I knew how it was. I could tell, I'd oath it. And when I went up just now, the whole thing was as clear to me as chrystial."

"Well, I only hope your words may come true," said Joanna.

"I'm right for a million. I'll lay any odds. It's the Monument to a molehill."

"I knowed a young ooman," observed the venerable gentleman, assuming that profoundly philosophical expression which he invariably wore when about to illustrate any particular point by analogy,—“I knowed a young ooman—and a werry nice young ooman she vos—vich vos in a decline. Werry well. For a matter of more than three 'ear she vos a-goin', and a-goin', and a-goin' gradual; but she never for all that believed she vos a-goin', although she vos terrible thin, and looked as pale as any sheet of vite paper. She voodn't believe it, cos she always had a appetite, and vood always be a-eatin' from mornin' till night in the most onsatisfyin' manner you ever 'eared tell on. Werry well. Now, ven her flesh vos vasted nigh hall off her bones, and she looked like a

skeleton kivered vith kid, and hevery soul as looked at her thought that go she *must*, she all at vunce had the most beautifullest colour as ever vos seen upon a peach! She looked like a angel as she sit all in vite; and as her little tiny fingers vos a-playin' vith her curls, she vos a-smilin' as sweetly as if her little sisters in heaven vos a-visperin' to her softly, 'Hope—still hope!' And I remember," continued the venerable gentleman, as he wiped away a tear, which the vivid recollection of this scene had called forth,—“ I remember one sanguine friend, vich loved her, exclaiming ven he seed this 'ere colour in her cheeks, 'Now she's all right! vot a favourable change! Blessed be God, she'll get over it now! But vot vos it? Natur' blushing to part so pure a soul from a body so fair: nothing else! In an hour after that exclamation vos uttered, she died. Werry well. Now this seems to me to be a case werry similar: the pockets of your master is got the same complaint; havin' overrun the constable, his means has been long in a decline; and although he may jist now be suddenly

flush, and you may, in sconsequence, vishin' him vell, feel yourself justifiable in offerin' to bet any hods it's all right, it strikes me forcible that this here flush is on'y a sign that the whole 'stablishment 's jist on the p'int of goin' to pot. That's my sentiments. I hope I may be wrong; but that's jist vot strikes me. I shall be werry sorry, mind yer, to 'ear it, cos I do think your master's a trump; vile your missis, accordin' to all accounts, is a werry good sort."

"She *is* a *regular* good 'un!" cried Bob. "A out-and-outer! I never see her feller yet; and nothing would hurt my sentiments so much as to see your blessed words come true; for I'm sure that if anything rotten was to go for to occur, she'd break her heart."

"Vell, I hope I may be wrong. But I 'spose you know Joanna's a-goin' to give vornin'?"

"Well, she may if she likes, in course; but I won't: I'd stop with 'em if it wos on'y for my vittles."

"She is not," rejoined the venerable gentleman, "a-goin' to give vornin' cos she don't

git her vages, but in sconsequence of other circumstantialials!"

"Oh, that there's the day o' the month, is it?" cried Bob, who saw Joanna blush at the moment, and look very archly, while the venerable gentleman chuckled, and drove his fingers into Bob's ribs, and rubbed his hands with great glee. "I see! Well, I wish you joy with all my heart. In course *I* stand godfather to the first?"

"Robert!" cried Joanna, with a most roguish look. "Lor! how *can* you go on so?"

"Oh! but I expect it; and if it's a heir, I'll make him a present of a hat to begin life with. But when is it to be?"

"Vy, as a mutual friend to both," replied the venerable gentleman, "ve don't mind telling of you, cos ve vant you to give away the bride—hif you'll do us the honner?"

"In course! Oh, yes! You do me proud. Well?"

"Well, then, Joanna gives vornin' to-morrow; ve shall be arkst for the fust time in

church next Sunday; and as she vill leave on the ninth of next month, the job's to be jobbed on the tenth."

"Bravo!" cried Bob. "The time's drawin' very near! How do you mean to pass the day?"

"Vy, ve don't think it's vuth vile to make much fuss: ve think that that, under all circumstantial's, may be dispensed vith; but ve mean to enjoy ourselves, you know. Ve mean to be jolly. No expense shall be spared. Ve'll 'ave everythink comfortable and reg'lar."

"Well, all I can say is, I hope you'll be happy."

"Safe!" replied the venerable gentleman with much ardour; when, turning to his betrothed, he added, "Can there be hany doubt *about* it?"

"Not the least, dear," replied Joanna, with a most winning smile. "I am sure we shall be happy."

"I should think so!" cried the venerable gentleman. "Vot is there to perwent it? I don't mean to say I'm so young as I vos p'haps

twenty 'ear ago, but vot o' that? The constitution's the p'int! If that's sound and reg'lar, vy vot's the hods?"

"But you don't look old in my eye, by no means," observed the affectionate Joanna.

"Don't I?" returned the venerable gentleman, with one of his most fascinating smiles. "You're a rogue!—I know you're a rogue, and there's no mistake of any sort about you. Howsever," he added, "looks isn't the pint: the great and grand thing is, the glorious constitution; and, as mine's as sound as a apple, it makes no hods about the hage."

Joanna agreed with him perfectly of course; and, as he shortly after this took leave of his beloved, Bob accompanied him to the nearest public-house, with the view of talking matters over in private.

Here Stanley's affairs were again freely canvassed; but, although Bob endeavoured to make things appear as bright as possible, his venerable friend adhered still to the opinion he had expressed—an opinion, the perfect correctness of which was on the following morning, by an act of consummate villany, proved.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE BILLS OF EXCHANGE.

WHILE Amelia was occupied in settling the accounts of those tradesmen who had been so importunate, Stanley received two letters, of which the contents were to the effect that two bills drawn by him, and accepted by Filcher, each for five hundred pounds, due the previous day, had been dishonoured, and that unless the amounts were immediately paid, proceedings would be forthwith commenced.

On receiving these letters, which were brought by the same post, Stanley's blood became hot; and having resolved to demand an explanation of Filcher, who had promised to destroy these bills, he ordered his cab to be brought to the door with all possible despatch.

Before, however, this could be accomplished, a banker's clerk called, and on producing a pocket-book to which a chain was attached for security, presented another five hundred pound bill—one of Stanley's own acceptances—for payment, which was certainly unfortunate: that is to say, an unfortunate time for such a bill to be presented, albeit the circumstance of bills being brought at the very time they are not wanted, is one which will, in all probability, excite in the minds of men less and less surprise as they gradually approach the perfection of civilization.

But, although it was in one point of view an unfortunate time for this bill to be presented, in another it was fortunate, inasmuch as Amelia was from home, while the clerk was one of those extremely pleasant persons who deem it correct to fright one's house from its propriety by explaining the nature of such business at the door. In this particular case it was stated with great minuteness to the servant, who, as in duty bound, delivered the message to his master as correctly as he could.

“Gentleman,” said he, “called—five hundred pound, sir—bill, sir.”

“What!” exclaimed Stanley.

“Gentleman, sir—five hundred pound——”

“Show him up.”

The clerk — who evidently prided himself upon his picturesque personal appearance, having rings on his fingers and pins in his stock, while a dazzling watch-guard was laced over his waistcoat with surpassing ingenuity—was accordingly introduced.

“Now, sir; what is the meaning of this?” cried Stanley, darting a look of fury at him. “Come, sir, explain!”

This rather astonished the faculties of the clerk, for he really had nothing to explain, and he said so: he had merely to present a bill for payment, and that was all he either knew or cared about the matter.

“Let me tell you,” said Stanley, who being unacquainted with the straightforward functions of his visiter, viewed him as one of the Captain’s swindling confederates; “let me tell you that this is a most villanous transaction!”

"It may be," said the clerk. "I know nothing of it."

"Don't tell me, sir, you know nothing of it! Where did you come from? Who sent you?"

"I came in the regular course of business!"

"Who sent you?—but why do I ask? You may tell Captain Filcher from me—but I'll tell him myself."

"Then I'd better leave a notice?"

"I'll have *nothing* left! Quit the house!—*instantly*, or I'll kick you to the devil."

The clerk would have smiled, but as the fierce look and violent action of Stanley inspired him at once with an idea that at that particular moment it would be hardly safe to smile, he withdrew with a deep sense of the indignity he had suffered, and left the notice with the servant below.

The cab was now announced, and Stanley, trembling with passion, descended; but he had no sooner got to the door than another banker's clerk came with another bill for five hundred pounds, which so enraged him, that, holding him as he did to be another confeder-

rate, he knocked him down violently, stepped into the cab, and drove off without uttering a word.

“Well!” said Bob privately as he mounted behind, “that’s the tidiest done thing I ever *did* see! I wonder what’s the state of the blessed stocks now? Something smokes—safe! I wouldn’t have had that there straightforrard hit, at a gift! that’s my candid opinion.”

“Stop him! stop him!” shouted the clerk, on recovering in some slight degree those senses of which he had been for a moment deprived; “stop *him*! stop the cab, there! police! police!”

Stanley heeded him not; he in fact scarcely heard him: certainly the impetuosity with which he drove was not ascribable to any apprehension on his part of being overtaken. But the clerk thought otherwise; his firm conviction was, that his assailant was dreadfully alarmed; he therefore put on the steam, and ran with wonderful velocity; and it is really amazing how fast men will run when they believe that they are feared by those whom they pursue.

“It’s of no use, my leetle swell,” said Bob with great caution, as he turned to view the strenuous physical efforts of the clerk,—“It ain’t a ha’porth of use; and it’s well for you it ain’t; for if you wos to come up with us now, I’d take your odds that when you shaved yourself in the morning you wouldn’t know your own mug. I don’t pertend to understand the merits of the case; but masters ain’t very particular; you’d on’y get victimized more; so you’d better give it up, because, try all you *know*, you wouldn’t catch us in a fortnight!”

And this, after a hard run of five hundred yards, seemed to be the opinion of the clerk, for, having exerted himself to that extent with the most exemplary spirit, he pulled up to pant, and then returned to the house, with his noble bosom swelling with vengeance. *He’d* teach him the difference! *He’d* let him see! *He’d* make him pay dearly! *He’d* serve him out sweetly when he caught him! In short, he didn’t exactly know what he wouldn’t do, and that was a positive fact.

Stanley, who had continued to drive at a slapping pace, soon arrived at the door of the

European, when Bob, who considered it expedient to look out with unexampled sharpness, flew to the head of the horse like a fairy.

The door of the European was open, but nearly the whole of the windows were closed; and as Stanley alighted, the porter, who had been packing up a box in the hall, and who was then the only person in the house, bowed respectfully, but with an expression which seemed to indicate that nothing was to be got out of *him*. And this proved to be the case: he knew nothing. He believed, but couldn't tell. He thought, but didn't know. It was possible that the Captain was living somewhere, but he couldn't tell where; nor could he tell whether the Earl was or was not in town: he might be, or he might not; perhaps he was, but he couldn't say.

The manifestly gross equivocation of this fellow tended to confirm Stanley's fears, and having left him with the conviction that he had been instructed to know nothing, he called upon all whom he knew to have been the associates of Filcher, including Sir William and

the Earl; but as from them he was unable to obtain the slightest information having reference to the scoundrel's retreat, he returned home in a state of mind bordering upon madness.

Amelia—who, as she fondly conceived, had been removing every cause of annoyance by paying the bills of her tradesmen, the whole of whom had not only expressed their sorrow at having been compelled to be so pressing, but had earnestly solicited a continuance of that patronage, which they, of course, declared it would be their study to deserve—received him on his return with a smile of joy. She had heard nothing of the presentation of the bills; nor had she—by a miracle—heard a word about the assault which during her absence had been committed at the door: her happiness was therefore undisturbed until she perceived that Stanley, on receiving her embrace, looked haggard and wild, when the delight she had experienced instantly vanished, and her mind again teemed with the most painful apprehensions.

“ Dear Stanley, are you not well ?” she inquired with an expression of fond affection, mingled with sadness.

“ I am not,” replied Stanley, in tones which seemed to indicate a broken spirit. “ I am not. It will soon pass off.”

“ I am very sorry that you are not well, dear. What is the matter ?”

“ Nothing—nothing. I shall soon recover. Leave me—leave me.”

“ Will you not——”

“ *Leave me !*” cried Stanley, in a furious tone. “ *Why* do you delight in tormenting me thus ?”

Amelia looked at him steadfastly for an instant, and then burst into tears ; which Stanley no sooner perceived than he embraced and kissed her fondly.

“ Forgive me,” said he ; “ I did not mean to speak harshly. You are a dear, good girl. Believe me, I would not afflict you, Amelia, for the world. But I have been much annoyed, my love—very much annoyed. I know that it was cruel to speak to you thus ; but indeed I scarcely knew what I said.”

Far less than this would have been sufficient for Amelia, who instantly tried to look joyous and gay.

“ I know, my dear Stanley,” she observed, “ that you never intend to speak unkindly to me ; of that I am perfectly sure, and I am therefore a weak simple creature to attach so much importance to an unkind word ; but, my Stanley, I have been so accustomed to associate you with all that is generous, forgiving, and kind, that the slightest reproof from you pierces my heart. *Bless you!*” she added, kissing him passionately, “ you are a dear good soul. I ’ll not stay another moment to tease you ; but do look on the bright side, dear Stanley ! hope—still hope for the best. You do not know, dear, how happy I am when you are cheerful. Pray—pray do not be dull !”

“ I will not,” replied Stanley, as he led her to the door. “ I ’ll endeavour, at least, to be calm.” And when he had once more embraced her, she left the room, apparently gay, although in reality her heart was filled with sadness.

“ Well ! ” exclaimed Stanley, on being left alone, “ what is to be done ? What *can* be done ? Fool !—fool !—consummate, wretched fool ! And yet, who could have conceived it to be possible ! How am I to act ? How *can* I act ? What can I do ? Nothing ! I cannot expose that villain without exposing myself ! For my own sake the matter must not be made public. If the object for which I gave him these bills were to be known, my reputation would be for ever blasted. But surely they ’ll not attempt to enforce payment ! they ’ll not dare to proceed farther ! It is, after all, probably done but to alarm me. Doubtless Clarendale suggested the thing in return for the part I took in that *soirée*. I wish now that I ’d not made any stir at all in the matter. However, I must take no more notice of it now. I was a fool not to see through the whole trick before.”

Had Stanley been a man of the world, he would have known that bills of exchange were not playthings, and had he known that, he would have known also how to proceed ; but,

being utterly ignorant of the nature of bills, he, following the advice of Amelia, by looking on the bright side only, buoyed himself up with the idea of their presentation being neither more nor less than a joke. He therefore became quite gay, and during dinner gladdened the heart of Amelia by playfully explaining that he saw clearly then that he had been but the victim of an excellent jest.

Immediately after dinner, however, the servant informed him that a person had brought a private letter, with instructions to deliver it only into the hands of Mr. Thorn, which Stanley thought strange ; but, conceiving it to be a communication from either Clarendale or Filcher, he desired his servant to show the messenger in. A person who had evidently seen better days was accordingly ushered into the room ; but, on finding that Stanley was not as he had expected, alone, he hesitated, bowed, and looked very mysterious.

“ Can I speak with you, sir, in private ? ” he inquired.

“ You have a letter for me, I understand ? ”

"I have, sir, if I've the pleasure to address Mr. Thorn."

"That is my name. Where does it come from?"

"I'd rather deliver it to you, sir, in private."

"Oh! we are sufficiently private! Here, what is it all about?"

The messenger, although with evident reluctance, handed him the "letter," which was neither directed nor sealed, and which was found to contain nothing—but a writ!

Stanley's countenance instantly fell. The very moment he saw what it was, the idea of its being a jest vanished, and he became again enraged.

"Why, you impudent scoundrel," he exclaimed, "what do you mean by bringing this to me under false pretences?"

"It's an unpleasant duty, sir: still but my duty."

"Leave the room!" shouted Stanley, starting up fiercely, and pointing to the door.

"My dearest love!" cried Amelia, throwing her arms round his neck, in a dreadful state of

trepidation, "my Stanley!—pray be calm—pray, pray, dear, be calm. Do leave," she added, turning to the messenger, "do, for *my* sake—pray leave the room."

The messenger accordingly did leave the room; but he thought it very hard, nevertheless, that, after doing the thing as delicately as possible, he should be so unhandsomely treated.

"What on earth is it?" cried Amelia, when this person had left.

"An insult!" replied Stanley, burning with rage.

"Pray do not resent it! But it may be but part of that jest of which you were speaking, after all."

Stanley thrust the writ into his pocket, and drank off several glasses of wine; while Amelia, who perceived that it would be inexpedient then to pursue the subject farther, was silent.

Scarcely five minutes, however, had elapsed, when the servant again entered to announce the arrival of another mysterious messenger, who had to make a communication of the

utmost importance, and of a character so strictly confidential, that to deliver it to any one but Stanley himself, seemed to be something bearing the semblance of high treason.

“ Bring him in !” cried Stanley, with a reckless air. “ If he comes with a legion of devils at his back, bring him in !”

The servant stared as he bowed, for he couldn't tell exactly what to make of it. He evidently held it to be a sort of thing rather unusual, but he nevertheless managed to back out with grace ; and having accomplished this feat, he introduced the child of mystery, who stood six feet and some odd inches high.

“ Well ! what do *you* want ?” said Stanley, as this long individual entered.

“ Mr. Thorn, have I the honour to address ?”

“ You have that *honour*.”

“ I have a document here,” said the long person, gravely, and producing a writ, he presented it in form.

“ Oh !” said Stanley, “ that's it. Will you have a glass of wine ?”

The long man bowed, and looked as amiable as if he thought that he really never met with so pleasant a fellow in the whole course of his life.

“ You shall have one,” said Stanley.

“ I feel much obliged.”

Stanley filled a bumper, and dashed it in his face.

“ Will you have another ?” he inquired.

The tall individual shook his head, for he really felt very uncomfortable.

“ *Will* you have another ?” repeated Stanley.

“ No, I’ll not.”

“ Then be off, or I’ll kick you out of the house.”

“ *Kick* me, and I’ll give you a little law. I should only just like to see you do it. Now then !—here I am !—kick me !”

“ Stanley, Stanley !” cried Amelia, restraining him, as he was about to make a furious rush, “ *dear* Stanley !—*do* you wish to see me fall dead at your feet ? Go sir,” she added, addressing the stranger, “ go, if you are a man !—leave us, or blood will be shed !”

This intimation startled the stranger, who being by no means valiant, retreated; but in his retreat, he amazingly blustered about what he would have done had he only been kicked.

“ You will break my heart, Stanley,” cried Amelia, when the tall man had left, “ I am sure you will : I cannot endure it.”

“ Oh ! nonsense !—nonsense !” said Stanley, who, having taken too much wine, assumed an air of reckless jolity. “ Ha ! ha ! ha ! ha ! he looked like a drowned devil. I suppose we shall have a few more of them here by and by. But don’t be alarmed !—there’s nothing to be alarmed at !—nothing—nothing—nothing !”

Amelia, who was convinced by the scowl which accompanied the slow utterance of the last word, that there was *something* to be apprehended, left the room, with the view of instructing the servant to state, if any other person called, that his master was indisposed, and therefore could not be seen ; and having delivered this instruction, she was about to return to Stanley, when a single knock induced her to remain in the hall.

The door was opened. It was a policeman : he had called to serve an assault warrant ; and Amelia, whose heart sank at the intelligence, tremblingly begged of him to leave it with her, and assured him that it should have due attention. The policeman consented ; and as he was leaving, a notary's clerk came with one of the bills which had been presented in the morning. This also Amelia, who could scarcely sustain herself, wished to have left ; but as the clerk declined, on the ground of its being *rather* unusual, she assured him that it should be attended to, and he seemed to be content. Before, however, the door had been closed, another notary's clerk called with the other dishonoured bill, which made Amelia tremble with increased violence. She did, however, manage to falter out the same assurance as that which she had previously given ; but, having done so, she instantly fainted.

Stanley was of course unconscious of all this : he was, in fact, unconscious of almost everything, then ; for having during Amelia's absence, proposed to himself innumerable

toasts and sentiments,—such, for example, as, “Confusion to Filcher, and all of that kidney,”—the whole of which he, of course, drank in bumpers,—he got on swimmingly in more senses than one; but although, while proposing these toasts, and returning thanks for the persons thus honoured, he appeared to repudiate all thought of care, the recollection of his real position stung him to the soul, and at intervals goaded him almost to madness.

Amelia, notwithstanding restoratives were applied with sufficient promptitude and zeal, was for a long time insensible; and when she recovered, it was but to be tortured by those dreadful feelings, which can be understood and appreciated only by those who are capable of conceiving the agony experienced by a fond, gentle, amiable wife, who perceives ruin rapidly approaching her home.

Resolved, however, not to sink before the blow had been struck, she rallied; and, on finding herself sufficiently composed, returned to the dining-room, as Stanley was in the act of returning thanks in his sleep, for the ladies, at

the head of whom he placed his Amelia, whose virtues he highly and eloquently extolled.

She tried to arouse him ; but as every effort failed, she placed a cushion beneath his head, and wept over him, and prayed to Heaven, with irrepressible fervour, that he might be blessed, and preserved from all perils, and continued to watch him anxiously till midnight, when he awoke.

His sleep had refreshed him ; but the effects of the wine were still apparent. He was pale and confused, and while his full eyes glared with an unnatural lustre, his language was strangely incoherent and wild.

Amelia ordered coffee, of which he partook, and they almost immediately afterwards retired ; but, while he slept even more soundly than usual, her apprehensions lashed repose from her.

What hours, what miserable hours are those which are passed by the afflicted between midnight and dawn, when the soul is tortured, and the mind is on the rack, teeming with imaginary calamities, which appear in shapes more

appalling than if they were real,—when all our thoughts conspire to afflict us,—when we are able to contemplate nothing but that which gives us pain, and when everything in nature seems reposing but our spirit, to which the power of endurance only appears to be allied. Even when the mind is comparatively tranquil, they are the most weary hours that are spent ; but when tortured by the conception of impending ruin, they are pregnant with agony. And in agony Amelia passed these wretched hours, of which the silence was broken only by her sighs, while she pressed Stanley closely to her heart, as if to be *sure* that she was not alone.

When the hour at which they usually rose had arrived, Stanley, who had some recollection of what had occurred the previous evening, made his customary apology, which was never on any occasion very elaborate, or drawn out to any great length ; but, although brief, Amelia received it, and sealed her forgiveness, as usual, with a kiss. The intelligence, however, having reference to the warrant, she did not communicate then : that she deferred till

after breakfast, when she placed the imperative document into his hands, and explained to him the manner in which it had been left.

Having perused it, Stanley smiled, and assured her that it was a thing of no importance.

“But have you committed an assault?” she inquired.

“I knocked a fellow down at the door. They call *that* an assault, I suppose.”

“How *can* you be so rash, dear? Really you will get into all sorts of trouble.”

“Oh! I’ll soon settle that. It’s a matter of no moment whatever.”

“But what could have induced you to do it?”

“Oh! he came here boring about a bill, or something of that sort.”

“Then he called again last evening. Two persons called about bills!”

“Two! What did they say?”

“They wished to know if I thought they would be attended to, and I told them that they would. Did I do right?”

“Oh! yes; quite right—quite right—they shall be attended to with a vengeance!”

Being summoned to appear before the magistrate at eleven, he then ordered his cab, and, on its being brought, drove to the corner of Argyll Place, where he alighted, and walked to the police-office, at the door of which he was accosted by an officer, who informed him that the complainant had no desire to press the charge, provided he made him some slight compensation.

“ I’ll not give him a shilling !” said Stanley.
“ Let the thing take its course. I have reason to believe that he is connected with a gang of swindlers, into whose hands, it appears, certain bills of mine have fallen.”

The policeman at once beckoned to the complainant, who approached with a pair of remarkably ugly black eyes, Stanley having struck him faithfully between them, and, in reply to a question touching the respectability of his connections, stated that he had been in the employ of the bankers for several years, and that all he had to do with the bill was to present it for payment in the regular course of business.

"Then," said Stanley, "do you mean to say that you know nothing of the parties?"

"Nothing whatever, sir, I assure you. I cannot be supposed to know the parties whose names are on the bills which come into my possession. I had fifty other bills in my book at the time, and I have on the average fifty every morning.

Stanley now perceived that he had made a mistake, and apologised for being so impetuous.

"I am sorry it occurred," said he. "My only excuse is, my utter ignorance of matters of business. What would the magistrate have fined me, had the case been brought before him?"

"Not *less* than three pound," replied the policeman. "The blow was tremendous!"

"It was rather severe, I perceive," rejoined Stanley. "How much of that fine would have been yours?"

"Oh! nothing," returned the policeman. "Fines always go to the crown."

Stanley immediately gave the victim five

sovereigns, and one to the policeman for conducting the negociation ; and, when they had expressed themselves perfectly satisfied, he returned to his cab, and drove home.

During his absence Amelia had had additional cause for alarm. Two other five hundred pound bills had been presented ; and the notices, with two “ forthwith ” letters,—for it really would appear to be illegal for an attorney to send a letter without *forthwith* in it,—announcing the dishonour of two of Filcher’s acceptances, were placed into his hands on his return.

This appeared to complete his prostration. Nothing seemed to be needed then either to subdue his spirit or to render his misery perfect. Raving was useless. He knew not how to act. The whole of the bills—eight for five hundred each—had been presented, and on the following day he had writs for them all.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE ELOPEMENT.

It having been stated that a certain transfer was about to be arranged between Filcher and the Earl, it will now be correct to explain that the object proposed to be transferred was the Countess.

Clarendale—the minds of whose family he greatly relieved by convincing them that his was a mock marriage only—had been so rallied since the *soirée* affair, that, being at the same time naturally apprehensive of another ridiculous display of dignity, he resolved to get rid of the annoyance if possible, without a public *exposé* being consequent thereon.

The difficulty of accomplishing this at first appeared to be insurmountable. He felt quite



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sure that if he explained to his victim the atrocious deception he had practised, its immediate proclamation to the world would be inevitable, if even he were to offer a conditional annuity, to cease if the secret were revealed ; and being unable to devise any other means by which the object in view was ever likely to be attained, he applied to his friend Filcher, who at once undertook to carry her off, and thus to render whatever claim she might have upon him void.

For Clarendale this was, of course, the very thing. He applauded the notion highly, and having sufficiently flattered the vanity of his friend, by declaring that he believed him to be the only man who had the power to execute the design, he offered to give him five hundred pounds immediately after the elopement.

Filcher, knowing that he had to deal with as great a villain as himself, insisted upon having the money down before he started ; and, when this had been agreed to, he laid out his plans.

At first he proceeded with caution ; but having touched the right chord, he spoke with

due indignation of the Earl's manifest indifference,—denounced him bitterly for neglecting one so amiable, so lovely, and so young,—and explained how she *ought* to be treated, what she *ought* to do and to have, and what every other Countess in the kingdom would *demand*!—without failing to describe how *he* would have indulged her had she been allied to him; and as all this won the approbation of her mamma, whom he viewed as an admirable auxiliar, she soon became perfectly wretched.

Having succeeded thus far, he imagined all secure; and, being anxious to be out of the way when Stanley's bills became due, he arranged all he had to arrange in town, and, notwithstanding he felt well convinced that any open attack even then would be repulsed, fixed the day for their departure.

At his suggestion, the Earl had been absent during three successive nights, and when he made his usual call the day before that on which he had decided upon starting, he listened to an afflicting recital of the fact with due gravity and attention.

“ I am amazed,” said he, when this had been indignantly dwelt upon by the Countess and her mamma, with whom he had managed to become an immense favourite, “ I am perfectly amazed that a lady of spirit like the Countess should tolerate such horrible conduct. It really appears to me to be monstrous.”

“ Monstrous !” exclaimed her mamma. “ It’s abominable ! *I* wouldn’t put up with it from any man, not if even he was a bishop ! Not I ; nor would she, if she was me.”

“ But how can I help it, ma ? What can I do ?” cried the Countess.

“ Do ! Support your dignity ! That’s what do ! Really you don’t seem to me to have a mite of nobility about you. It’s very well he hasn’t me to deal with. Do you think that I’d be mumped up here in this perdicament ; never going nowhere, nor nothing : no balls, no parties, no operers, nor nothing of that ?”

“ But what am I to do, ma, if he won’t let me go ?”

“ Won’t let you go ! It’s a pity you throwed yourself away upon him : that’s *my* belief.

But I would go ! I'd go, if it was only out of spite !”

“ Upon my honour,” said Filcher, addressing the Countess, “ I really must say that you are to be blamed. You make no stir at all in the world ! You have rank, amiability, and beauty, with many other qualities calculated to enable you to shine forth with lustre in the most brilliant sphere, and yet with all these, by heavens ! you are scarcely known ! I speak now with the warmth of a friend. I should not be a friend were I to conceal the fact from you. Who knows the Countess of Clarendale ? Whom does she visit ? Who visits her ? In what fashionable circle does she move ? Where is she ever met with ? Where is she ever seen ? These are questions which the world *will* ask, and who in the world is to answer ?”

“ Haven't I said the same thing over and over, and over again !” interposed Mrs. Gills. “ Haven't I been dinging it into her ears daily !”

“ The aristocracy of this country,” pursued Filcher, “ is composed of the most agreeable

people under heaven ; and why you, having so many advantages, should deprive yourself thus of their society, in which you would not only impart, but derive supreme delight, I really cannot at all understand."

" *Will* you tell me," said the Countess, earnestly, " what I am to do ? "

" Why," replied Filcher, " it may be deemed presumptuous in me to offer you advice ; but I should certainly say that you ought to do that which is done by other ladies of title."

" But how do they do ? That is what I want to know ! Suppose yourself now in my position, and then tell me how you would act."

" Have you ever been on the Continent ? " rejoined Filcher.

" Never. I was once going as ladies' — "

" My precious ! " exclaimed her mamma.

The Countess blushed and then resumed.

" Yes, I was once going in company with some ladies, but — I didn't go — I never went at all."

" Then, if I were you," said Filcher, " I

should in the very first place take a continental tour."

"But how am I to get him to go with me?"

"It is on that very point you err. You expect him to do everything for you, when in reality you ought to do everything for yourself."

"That's it!" exclaimed her mamma. "The very thing I've been a-harping upon till I'm sick."

"Well, but *how* am I to go, if so be he won't take me?"

"Is it absolutely necessary," observed Filcher, "that he should accompany you every where?"

"Certainly *not*," said Mrs. Gills. "The less a man is tied to a woman's apron-string the better."

"But do you mean to tell me now," rejoined the Countess, "that I can take a continental tour alone?"

"Alone!" returned Filcher. "No; that would be entirely out of the question. No lady

of title ever travels alone. Your mamma would accompany you, of course."

"But ma can't talk French, you know, any more than me."

"Oh! that would not be of the slightest importance. Of course you would have with you some gentleman who could?"

"Ah!—well, I thought you couldn't mean that ma and me should go and run about the Continent alone. But what gentleman could we get to go with us?"

"Oh! hundreds would be delighted to accompany you, or any other lady of title. For instance, I think myself of starting for Calais to-morrow, and from thence I shall go to Paris, thence to Italy, Switzerland, and so on; and I am sure you may in any way command *my* services."

"But you don't mean to say that you are going off to-morrow?"

"I am, if nothing of importance should occur to prevent me."

"Oh! how dearly I should like to go too!"

"You would, I am sure, be delighted. Be-

sides, it would be highly advantageous. You know," he added, addressing her mamma, "what an extremely elegant tone a continental trip gives to a woman of fashion."

"In course!—there's nothing like it!" returned Mrs. Gills.

"Oh!" exclaimed the Countess, "I should love to go dearly!"

"Why not, then, make up your mind to go at once?"

"Well, I really have a great mind to ask him to let me."

"The old error!" said Filcher. "Why ask his *permission*? You are not his servant."

"That's just what I tell her," observed her mamma. "If she was only a mere housemaid, she couldn't do more."

"It should always be remembered," said Filcher, "that you are now your own mistress, and that the exalted position you occupy entitles you to have in all matters a will of your own."

"But would it be correct for me to go without asking his leave, or saying a word to him on the subject?"

“Of course! Decidedly! It is done by all ladies of title. It forms one of their chief characteristics. It is, in a word, that very independence which distinguishes them from people of no importance.”

“That’s it!” said Mrs. Gills. “Independence is the thing! That’s what I have always stuck up for.”

“If, indeed,” resumed Filcher, “you were to make up your mind, you might say, if you happened to see him, ‘I am going for a short tour on the Continent with mamma and Captain Filcher;’ but should you not see him, why, all you need do then would be to write a note to that effect, and desire your servant to give it to him on his return. But probably you have no desire to travel?”

“Oh! I should love it above all things! Shouldn’t you, ma?”

“Certainly, my love: I have always longed to see foreign parts; and I’m sure, as the Captain says, in your present position, it would do you all the good in the world.”

“Besides,” observed Filcher, “the advan-

tages to be derived from it at this particular time are incalculable ; for, independently of the continental tone which the Countess would acquire, and which is of itself an extremely valuable acquisition, her absence from Clarendale just now would have the effect of raising her in his estimation ; for it appears to be very clear to me that he does not sufficiently appreciate her value."

"That's very true," said Mrs. Gills ; " no more he doesn't. He don't know what a treasure he's got. I'll say it, although she's my daughter."

"So that you see," resumed Filcher, "that while sustaining her dignity, and deriving all the brilliant advantages of foreign travel, she would be laying the foundation of her importance at home, and extending her influence, as a lady of title ought."

"To be sure she would. It's my notion, percisely."

"But lor though if we *were* to go!" exclaimed the Countess. "My patience me, though, what *would* he say?"

“Why, that you were what every lady of title ought to be,— a woman of spirit,” replied Filcher. “He would be pleased, I am sure of it, and would have a higher opinion of you than ever. But I beg you’ll not allow me to persuade you against your own inclinations.”

“Oh, dear me, no ! I should, I am sure, be delighted !”

“I merely throw out the hint as a friend, in the full conviction of its being the only way to bring him to a sense of what is due to you ; and, as I *am* going, it will not of course put me at all out of the way ; and I am quite sure that Clarendale, when he hears that I am with you, will feel perfectly satisfied of your being well protected.”

“But won’t it be very expensive ?” inquired Mrs. Gills.

“Oh ! not at all. You can live on the Continent, you know, for a mere trifle. But I’ll manage that. I should like you to go, because I think you would be so enchanted.”

“Well, what do you think, ma ? Shall we ?”

“Why it’s an opportunity that certainly don’t ought to be lost, my love, that’s what I look at. But then, you see, the mischief of it is, there’s no time to prepare.”

“The notice *is* very short,” added the Countess.

“So much the better,” cried Filcher. “It will show that you are not only a woman of spirit, but a creature of impulse!—which is highly important.”

“But I think,” said Mrs. Gills, “it would be just as well, you know, to name the subject to him.”

“Oh! I’d name it to him, by all means, if he came home; but if not, why, it’s a thing which in high life is never expected. Look among the fashionable arrivals and departures in any of the daily papers, and you will see that the Duchess of So-and-so started for the lakes. Where’s the Duke? Why, in town! That the Countess of Grogram, for example, has just arrived from the Continent. Where is the Earl? Why, over there. Among the aristocracy, these things are understood. They

are not like *common* people : they are perfectly independent of each other."

"Oh ! I see the distinction," observed Mrs. Gills ; " and a very good distinction it is, in my mind. It is nothing but proper that people of quality should conduct themselves distinct from the mere common scum."

"Well, ma, *shall* we go ?"

"Oh, I'm *quite* agreeable, my love ; and I think we ought to be much obleedged to the Captain into the bargain."

"Not at all," cried Filcher. "Oh, dear me, no—not at all. I shall feel highly honoured."

"Won't it be nice, ma ? Won't it be beautiful when we return, to say we've been to Paris, and we've been to Germany, and we've been to Italy, and seen this and that ! My gracious me, though, won't it be delicious ! I shall be in such a fidget until we are off !"

"I thought of starting at ten to-morrow morning ; but if that be too early for you, why we'll say eleven."

"Oh ! ten o'clock will do," said the Coun-

tess. "Ma and me can be both of us ready by ten."

"Well, then, let me see," said Filcher. "There will be you, your mamma, and myself,—that will be three; my servant and yours will make five altogether. Yes, that will do well."

"Oh! then, I'm to take a servant with me?"

"By all means, I should say. You will find it more convenient."

"Very well. We'll be ready. You'll be sure not to be later than ten?"

"At ten precisely the carriage shall be at the door," replied Filcher, who then took leave, and went direct to the hotel at which he knew the Earl was waiting to hear the result.

"What a nice man!" observed Mrs. Gills, when he had left. "I shouldn't a bit mind marrying such a man as that! He's such a gentleman!"

"That he is, is'nt he, ma?" cried the Countess.

"And understands the ways of the nobility so well."

“ And such a dear, too, to offer so kindly to ’scort us. I wonder though what my lord ’ll say !”

“ Oh, it’ll bring him to his senses. It’ll show him you aint’ the poor speritless thing he takes you for. He’ll treat you all the better. As the Captain says, there’s nothing in the world like supporting your independence and dignity. It’s just what I’ve always stuck up for. You know I’ve told you, times out of number, that you’d only to show that you had a little proper aristocracy about you to get yourself respected in your spere. But come, my precious ! we’ve no time to lose !”

“ Well, I hope he’ll come home, though, so that we may tell him !”

“ Don’t bother your head about that. If he comes home we’ll tell him : if he don’t he don’t ought to be told. We’ll just leave a note, and then start. All ladies of quality does it, and that’s quite enough.”

Of course the Earl took especial care not to return. Nor would he even leave the hotel,

lest they should, by any accident, see him. He and the Captain dined together, and having passed a jovial evening, separated with feelings of mutual satisfaction.

Punctually at ten on the following morning the Captain arrived in a carriage and four, and was much pleased to find that their minds were unchanged: indeed, they appeared to be more anxious than ever to go—a fact which was chiefly ascribable to the circumstance of Clarendale having been again out all night. Everything was in readiness. They were already dressed; the trunks were packed, and placed in the hall, while the servants were waiting to attach them to the carriage, and when this had been accomplished they started for Dover, without a moment's unnecessary delay.

As the Captain had engaged to take the carriage four stages, they proceeded in the most agreeable manner over Shooter's Hill, through Welling, Gravesend, Dartford and Rochester, to Sittingbourne. Here they stopped to take refreshment, and here it was that the Captain resolved to execute his de-

sign of escaping from the lively society of Mrs. Gills.

Having conducted the ladies into the inn, and given the necessary orders, he left them, and went into the yard, where he engaged two chaises for Canterbury, and called aside one of the post-boys, whose countenance he for some time scrutinized in the most mysterious manner.

“ I think,” said he at length,—“ I *think* that I may trust you !”

The fellow opened his mouth, and scratched his head, and looked as if he didn’t understand it: nor did he.

“ I do not believe that I am mistaken,” pursued Filcher. “ I can generally tell by the look of a man what he is; and if I am *not* deceived, I shall put five pounds at once into your pocket, and make you a handsome present on my return.”

The man stared, and looked *extremely* concerned! his amazement was unspeakable! he couldn’t make it out! Still, in the midst of his consternation he gracefully caught hold of a tuft of ragged hair upon his forehead, with

the view of conveying the idea of a most respectful bow.

“ I’m *sure* I may trust you,” continued Filcher gravely. “ I’ll therefore explain. I have two ladies with me—one young and lovely, the other old, and very disagreeable. Now the young one—to come to the point at once—I want to run away with, and as with your assistance I can manage it with ease³, the only question is, will you aid me ?”

Postboys are known, by all men of experience, to be the most chivalrous dogs upon the road,—the best fellows under heaven to assist in an elopement,—and as this was really one of the true breed, he without hesitation consented.

“ Boot,” said he, “ how be it to be doon ? I marn’t go the wrong rood !”

“ Can’t you pull the chaise into some dry ditch ?” suggested Filcher, “ and there stick for an hour or so ?”

“ To be sure I can ! That’s capital, be gum ! I never thoot o’ that now till you did. I’ll do’t.”

“ I may depend upon you ?”

“ Oh ! I’ll do’t !—I’ll do’t !”

“ Very well. Then let *your* chaise stand first at the door—there must be no mistake about that,—and when you get about half way between this and Canterbury, why there let us pass you, and *then*—you understand?—

“ Oh ! I’ll do’t handy, sir ; never fear that.”

The Captain then gave him five pounds and returned to the ladies.

“ I am sorry,” said he, on entering the room, “ that we must separate until we get to Canterbury. The carriage in which we came must go back, and I can get nothing here but a couple of chaises, neither of which will carry more than two.”

“ Oh ! we shall be able to manage !” cried the Countess.

“ I’m at a loss to guess how ! You see these machines have no seats outside. It is true, my servant can sit upon the bar ; but then, what’s to become of yours ?”

“ Oh ! let her ride inside with me !” said Mrs. Gills. “ I don’t mind, you know !—nobody won’t see us !”

This act of condescension was appreciated by the Captain, who, in return, however, simply said, "Well, as you please."

Accordingly, having concluded their repast, the Captain handed Mrs. Gills and the maid into the first chaise with unexampled grace, and when the Countess and himself were duly seated in the other,—to which all the trunks had been attached by his direction, their journey was resumed.

Entertaining in the extreme was the Captain, while the Countess was delighted as well with him as with herself, and thus they proceeded steadily, until they got to Faversham, where they passed the other chaise, which stopped ostensibly in order that one of the bridles might be slightly re-adjusted.

The Countess waved her hand as she passed, of course, and was recognized by her mamma, to whom the Captain mentally bade adieu, feeling convinced then that all was secure.

Nor was he deceived. On remounting, the postboy, who drove Mrs. Gills, followed with *great* care for nearly two miles, when all at

once his horses began to kick, and plunge, and snort, in the most miraculous manner possible.

"Be careful, there's a *good* man;" cried Mrs. Gills, thrusting her head out of one of the front windows.

"Blarm yer! wo!" cried the postboy, backing his horses violently. "Wo! D'yer want to get into the dike?"

And in an instant—in the twinkling of an eye—and with all the ingenuity at his command, he pulled the chaise into a ditch, which contained, instead of water, black mud, thickly coated with chick-weed.

"Oh! we shall be drowned!" shrieked Mrs. Gills, and that shriek was duly echoed by the maid, who entertained the same opinion.

"I *thought* what you was up to!" cried the postboy, who was somewhat of a wag in his way. "I knowed you was arter suffin'. What d'yer mean, hay? Ain't the rood wide enow for yer? Blarm yer carcasses! couldn't yer be satisfied arount gettin' into the dike?"

“ We shall be killed !—we shall be killed !” exclaimed Mrs. Gills frantically. “ Oh ! my good man ! my dear—dear good man !—pray get us out—*pray* do !”

“ Don’t be alarmed, mum !—oh ! don’t be alarmed ! there’s nothin’ bruk ! It’ll be all right ag’in in a little while, blarm ’em ! They *must* get into the dike ! I knowed what they was arter ! They’re about the most warmentest cattle as is. If they ever take anythin’ into their heads—”

“ Well—well—well ! get us out ! pray—pray get us out ! Oh dear ! I am ready to die.”

The fellow then opened the door, and with his aid they managed to alight in perfect safety, when he begged of them both as a favour not to be frightened, and set to work with the apparent view of getting the chaise out of the ditch.

And his efforts were desperate ! They were almost indeed superhuman. He reasoned with his horses, and lashed and pulled, while the wheels sank deeper and deeper, until at length, having dexterously backed into two good feet

of consistent mud, he gave the thing up in despair.

“It’s o’ no use,” said he, in a state of steaming perspiration. “It bean’t a single ha’p’orth o’ use! I *can’t* get un out!”

“What on earth are we to do, then?” exclaimed Mrs. Gills.

An idea seemed to strike him. “I have it!” said he; and he had. “Just walk about a little bit, ladies, and I’ll just gallop off for soom help.”

This was held by Mrs. Gills to be an admirable thought, and he immediately took his horses out, tied the head of the off-one to the wheel, mounted the other, and started back to Faversham for assistance, while the ladies promenaded in front of the chaise, in a horrible state of alarm.

Now, although the fellow went at a slapping pace until he had got out of sight, truth prompts the admission that he was, after that, in no hurry at all. He did, however, manage by dint of perseverance to do the last mile in about fifty minutes; and, having accomplished

that extraordinary feat, engaged three stout men, with whom, after having four pots of ale, he hastened back at the rate of full three miles an hour, until they came in sight of the chaise, when he started off again at full gallop, while the men commenced running as if from a fiend.

By this time the patience of both Mrs. Gills and the maid was as nearly as possible exhausted. To them the man appeared to have been gone a whole day! His re-appearance, however, cheered their weary hearts; and when he and his men came up breathless and hot, he received great applause for his noble exertions.

They then commenced work, and after having ingeniously experimentalized for about twenty minutes, they happily succeeded in getting the chaise out; and when Mrs. Gills had rewarded the men, and begged of the postboy to drive with all the speed that might indeed be consistent with their safety, they started once more.

The postboy, who then seemed most anxious to prove that his chief characteristic was cau-

tion, got his horses fairly into a legitimate jog and explained to them at length what he thought of their conduct with due indignation and point.

Having finished this lecture to his own satisfaction, he began to sing with nearly all the voice he had in him; and thus did he amuse himself, quite at his ease, until he arrived within half a mile of Canterbury, when, in order to finish his work with *éclat*, he treated his horses to a fair full trot, and dashed in style into the town.

Here immediate inquiries were made for the Countess and her companion; but, instead of finding them there, as she expected, Mrs. Gills ascertained that after waiting some time they had gone on. She therefore instantly ordered a fresh chaise, and followed them to Dover with all possible speed, but her search there was equally fruitless; for the Captain, on his arrival, having learned that a packet would start in an hour for Calais, instructed his servant to take all the luggage on board, which being effected, the Countess, of course, felt com-

pelled in a measure, to go on board too. This, however, was not done without great reluctance. She naturally wanted to wait for her mamma. What on earth could have become of her? What could she do on her arrival, when she found that they were gone?

The Captain calmed her fears by explaining that her mamma had in all probability been taken “the longest way round;” that, of course, she would be certain to find them at Calais; and that his servant,—to whom he had given private instructions—should remain to attend to her when she arrived; and having thus overruled her objections, they went on board the packet, which left Dover nearly two hours before Mrs. Gills reached the Royal Hotel.

CHAPTER XV.

THE ARREST—THE PROPOSAL—THE DUEL AND
ITS RESULT.

BEING totally unacquainted with the imperative character of the legal instruments he had then in his possession, Stanley knew not what course to pursue, but as Sir William had been from the first cognisant of the speculation into which he had entered, he eventually decided on soliciting his advice under the circumstances, conceiving that this might be done without his poverty being exposed.

He accordingly lost no time in laying the whole matter before him, and when the case had been fully explained, Sir William appeared to be, not only greatly surprised, but extremely indignant.

“However,” said he, “the thing is too

gross to succeed. Take no sort of notice of these writs, treat them with contempt."

"I should not care," said Stanley, "if it were a bona fide debt."

"Of course not; of course not; you'd settle it at once. But this is a fraud! a positive fraud! It is all very well for them thus to try it on; but it is sure to come to nothing unless, indeed, you are disposed to be frightened out of your money!"

"They'll not *frighten* me," replied Stanley. "That's quite out of the question. If that be their object, they'll fail."

"Then let them pursue their own course; let them cut their own throats. You will receive other papers in a few days, doubtless—burn them! When they find that you set them at defiance, they'll very soon relinquish their swindling scheme. It would indeed be monstrous if, in a country like this, a fraud so glaring and direct could succeed."

Acting upon this advice, which was of course the very worst that could have been given, Stanley troubled himself no more about

the matter. The declarations came, then the order to tax; but no notice whatever was taken until one of the parties had obtained final judgment.

Unconscious of the nature of the position in which he stood, having no more knowledge than a child of the fact that he might, at any hour, be arrested. Stanley continued to go about as usual; but the day after that on which the party had entered up judgment, he was accosted near the Albany by a person, who having approached him with an air of great mystery, touched his arm and said in an interesting whisper, "Mr. Thorn, will you walk on? I'll follow you."

"What do you mean?" inquired Stanley, who had not the most distant idea of the fellow's object. "Walk on?"

"Yes; and then no notice will be taken. I wouldn't have seen you myself but you have just been pointed out to me."

"What *do* you mean?"

The man smiled, and although he felt sure that his meaning was well understood, ex-

pressed himself quietly to the effect that the thing, in all probability, had not been expected.

“Will you,” said Stanley, “explain yourself at once?”

“Don’t you know a sheriff’s officer when you see him?” inquired the man, who really thought it a capital joke. “But, perhaps, you have never been taken before?”

Stanley now clearly perceived how it was, and the truth no sooner struck him than he became extremely tremulous and turned very pale. “Step this way with me,” said he, “I wish to consult a friend on this subject.”

“Anything to oblige,” returned the officer, who followed him at once to Sir William’s chambers.

“It appears that I am arrested,” said Stanley as he entered.

“Arrested!” echoed Sir William. “What, at the suit of those swindlers? Impossible!”

“Here is the officer! It does not *appear* to be impossible!”

“Well, I am amazed. The impudent

scoundrels! However, we'll soon settle this. You must go of course now; but I'll walk down with you, and ascertain what can be done. I'll work the rascals. I—leave them to me."

Stanley with a feeling of gratitude consented; and perhaps there are no conceivable circumstances under which a man appreciates the kind offices of a friend more highly than when situated as he was then. We are generally inclined, despite the cold-blooded doctrines of the hypocondriacal, to view the bright side of human nature, to confide in the faith of our fellow-men, to believe that there is infinite goodness in them, to repudiate the thought that "friends are always friends except when friends are needed," and, to reverse the unamiable precept which would prompt us to look upon every man as a rogue until we have absolutely proved him to be an honest man; but more strongly than ever do we incline to the belief—a belief perhaps partially based upon hope, that in the human heart kindness predominates when in periods of difficulty men come

forward with the ostensible view of rendering all possible assistance: it is then that we are most credulous on the subject of friendship; it is then that faith generates feelings of pride; it is then that we flatter ourselves with the assurance that we have friends—true friends—friends prepared to make any sacrifice to serve us; it is then that we are most blinded by professions of friendship, and therefore most easily deceived.

Stanley felt that Sir William was his friend more strongly than ever; he was, indeed, anxious, to be guided by him solely, while the promptitude with which he undertook to “see him through it” inspired him with far more gratitude than his pride would allow him to express.

Having accompanied him to one of those establishments, in which respectable debtors usually receive their first impressions on the subject of the deprivation of social liberty, Sir William reassured him that he would immediately call upon the attornies and that nothing that could be done should be left undone by him.

“ But Amelia,” said Stanley, “ how are we to conceal it from her?”

“ Oh, I’ll manage that. You have been unexpectedly called into the country, or something of that sort.”

“ No,” said Stanley, “ no—no—that will not do: suspicion would at once be excited; she would never believe that anything could induce me to go out of town without taking leave of her. No; perhaps, as it appears that there is not much chance of my getting out of this place to-day, it would be better to explain it to her—gradually.”

“ Well; you know her best; let it be so. Will you write then, or shall I prepare her to receive the intelligence, and then bring it out in the course of conversation?”

“ Why, you can explain it in that way with greater effect than I can in a letter. You can say, you know, of course that the thing has been done to annoy me, and so on.”

“ I’ll manage it. But I shall see you again before then: I’ll return directly after I have seen the attornies, in order that you may know the result.”

Stanley thanked him warmly and he left, not however with the slightest intention of calling upon the attornies, but solely in order to perfect that scheme which he conceived might be then carried into execution. With this view he went to a neighbouring tavern and having sufficiently, in his judgment, dwelt upon the course to be pursued, and weighed each particular point with great minuteness, he returned to Stanley, to whom he stated, with an expression of disappointment, that the attornies in question could not be seen until the following morning when promising to be with them very early and to come direct from them to him he left, ostensibly, in order to explain to Amelia the nature of Stanley's position.

Amelia, whose happiness had daily increased since Stanley had become less impetuous, and who fondly conceived that that happiness would be permanent, as his passion for the gaieties of life had been materially subdued, was expecting him home when Sir William arrived. She was alone; the widow had just before left her; but when Sir William had

been announced, he was shown into the drawing-room and received as a much valued friend.

“ I expect Stanley every moment,” she observed. “ He is sure not to be long.”

“ Has he not been home within the last hour or two ?”

“ No ; he has been out the whole of the morning.”

“ Then you are probably not aware that I am to have the honour of dining with you to-day ?”

“ The honour will be ours,” returned Amelia with a smile, which was highly appreciated by Sir William, who bowed, and then entered into the various topics of the day, which were discussed on both sides with great spirit.

At length, however, Amelia began to get impatient. “ How tiresome,” she exclaimed, “ it is more than half an hour past the time ! But you gentlemen are all very tiresome creatures.”

“ All, did you say ?”

“ I said all, certainly ; but Sir William, on

this occasion, must of course be excepted. It will, I perceive, be more safe to say the majority, in future."

This led to a playful debate, which occupied another half hour, when Amelia exclaimed: "Well, now really, this is indeed very vexatious. I cannot conceive what on earth can detain him!"

"I begin to fear now," observed Sir William, "that we shall not have the pleasure of dining with him to-day."

"Oh, dear yes, I hope so! However, we'll give him one quarter of an hour longer; we'll give him no more. If he should not return by that time he must have, when he does return, a very severe scolding."

The next quarter of an hour was passed in most lively conversation, and the next, when as Stanley of course did not make his appearance Amelia, with great reluctance, rang the bell and having given the necessary instructions, was led by Sir William into the dining room with an expression of disappointment which she could not conceal, although feeling,

as a matter of courtesy, bound to be, if possible, gay.

During dinner, politeness the most refined alone characterized the conduct of Sir William, but that ceremony ended, he called all his brilliant conversational powers into play. As a man of the world in the common acceptation of that term, he had too much tact to permit precipitation in any case to weaken the chances of conquest, and while he knew that any direct attack upon virtue forms virtue's most invulnerable panoply, he attached due weight to the fact that wit and irony, highly tempered, are the most potent weapons that can be used, when the object in view is virtue's gradual subversion. He therefore sought to assail it imperceptibly at first, and then to proceed to an analysis of its nature, and having opened the subject of marriage he pursued it in a most lively strain, dwelling playfully upon its varied characteristics, and ironically darting at married persons, in the aggregate, the most highly polished shafts of ridicule.

Into all this Amelia entered, defending with spirit every point he asserted, and contrasting the most delightful features of married life with those which he portrayed and which were of course the most unamiable, without entertaining the most remote idea that he had any other object in view than that of whetting the dulness which, in her judgment, during Stanley's absence invariably characterized time.

At length, conceiving that he had made an excellent beginning, he approached nearer home, and having dwelt upon the credulity of married ladies in general on the subject of their husband's fidelity, and adduced a variety of instances to illustrate the strength of the position he had assumed, he spoke of Stanley, and after alluding to his personal attractions, observed, "Now, I should not be at all surprised if you, even you, were to repudiate the idea of his being unfaithful."

"Why, it would not be very surprising," returned Amelia, "if I did; and I certainly should, if it were possible for such an idea to be entertained."

“Just as I expected! You would not believe it!—No, not for the world!”

“I would not believe it for the world, without cause, nor would I, for the whole world, have cause to believe it.”

“Of course you would not! I knew that! Nor would you hold anything to be a sufficient cause.”

“Why—yes—that I might do.”

“Impossible!—surely!”

“Why,” rejoined Amelia smiling, “the circumstances certainly would have to be very strong!”

“But what conceivable circumstances could be strong enough?”

“Nay, that I cannot tell! But do you not think that a man of Stanley’s principle, strength of mind and delicacy of feeling would be utterly incapable of any act, involving the sacrifice of honour?”

Sir William smiled.

“But, tell me,” interrupted Amelia, resolved to adhere to that point; “do you imagine that such a man would thus wantonly

blight his own happiness and that of those with whom he is connected?"

"Certainly he ought not; but it does not follow, that because a man is faithless, the happiness of his home must be blighted!"

"Indeed?"

"If it did, I fear that happiness among married persons would have but an imaginary existence."

"Nay; now you are too severe!"

"No; not at all."

"But you surely do not mean to say that such a man as Stanley would be unfaithful?"

"Why, I don't know that he is so much unlike the rest."

"I have not so unworthy an opinion of the rest."

"Which proves the amiability of your character."

"Nor have you, I feel convinced, seriously."

"I cannot be serious on a subject of this kind; I cannot be tranquil," cried Sir William with a smile, "I feel much too indignant! But men are clever creatures—I allude

more especially to married men—who certainly do inspire with confidence those whom they constantly deceive, to an extent that is perfectly amazing. Let them remain out the whole day or even all night, it's a matter of no importance ; the most absolute impunity awaits them. Let them keep as many mistresses as fancy may prompt them to keep, neglecting those whom they vowed to honour and cherish, they have but to invent certain plausible tales, and, as you silly people believe them, they are of course all right with their consciences and you."

"Not, I apprehend, with their consciences!"

"Conscience sleeps while pleasure reigns!"

"To sting with ten-fold force when awakened. But you are speaking of men without principle—profligate men!"

"I speak of them all—all married men do it, more or less."

"Nay, nay ; that I cannot believe."

"I did not for a moment expect that you would ! As far as our dazzling friend Stanley is concerned, you would not believe anything

prejudicial to his reputation, were you even to know where he is, where he has been the whole of the day, and where moreover he is likely to be the whole of the night."

Amelia's countenance instantly changed. "Are you serious?" she inquired with an expression of the most intense earnestness. "Have you the slightest knowledge of where he is now?"

"It is manifest, by his continued absence, that he is in most attractive company."

"But do you know where he is?"

"Why I *could* give a pretty shrewd guess!"

"Where then do you imagine him to be?"

"Nay, that is a question which I must not answer. It would not be exactly fair between man and man. No, although his treatment of me to-day in remaining there when he had invited me here has not been, perhaps, precisely the thing, I am not at all disposed to retaliate in that way. If, indeed—"

"Sir William," interrupted Amelia, "I would submit that this is a subject which ought not to be pursued."

“ Why not, my dear madam ?”

“ Because, setting all ideas having reference to your friendship for Stanley aside, it may lead us beyond the strict bounds of delicacy.”

“ Oh, but these things in society are thought but little of. They happen daily—they are, in fact, occurrences for which every married lady ought to be prepared.”

“ I am not; nor do I wish to be prepared. But we must not dwell upon this subject any longer, for you jest so earnestly, that were I not secure in Stanley’s honour, you would positively make me quite jealous.”

“ Oh you ladies! you ladies! We have but returned to the point from which we started; we have but proved your credulity on this subject to be unbounded.”

A pause ensued; during which Amelia dwelt with unenviable feelings upon the various intimations she had received. Why—why did not Stanley return? Were there any sufficient grounds for suspicion? Where was he? In whose society? What could have detained him? It was strange! very strange!—Surely

he had not been seduced into the vortex of vice! His honour surely had preserved him! He was faithful and virtuous still! And yet, why—why did he not return?

Sir William, who watched with delight the development of those feelings which these unhappy thoughts had induced, and who exhibited every disposition to remain, although he saw that Amelia was most anxious for him to leave, suffered silence to prevail for some considerable time; but, at length, he exclaimed: “Well! you see, he does not return—nor will he to-night!”

“Oh do not say so; I hope, nay I feel quite sure that he will.”

“I can bear this no longer!” cried Sir William with a gesture which was intended to convey the idea that his feelings had been wound up to the very highest pitch of endurance. “Entertaining, as I do, the most exalted respect for your character, knowing as I do the confiding gentleness and unexampled amiability of your disposition, I feel myself bound by every principle of manliness, friendship and

justice, to conceal no longer the fact of his being utterly unworthy of you."

"Sir!" exclaimed Amelia fixing her eyes upon him with a flash of indignation.

"Do not misinterpret my object," he observed.

"What is your object?"

"To rescue an amiable creature from one who is as vain as he is heartless, one who can neither appreciate her admirable qualities nor love her."

Amelia, darting a look of contempt at him, instantly rose and rang the bell; but although this prompt proceeding in some slight degree amazed him, he, instead of appearing disconcerted, smiled, and remained silent until the servant entered.

"Is Sir William's carriage at the door?" inquired Amelia.

"I believe not, ma'am," replied the servant.

"Let me know when it arrives," said Sir William with perfect coolness, and as the servant immediately bowed and retired, he added "Why, my dear madam, why will you not hear me? I know that these truths are unpalata-

able, yet they are truths nevertheless—truths of which you ought not to remain in ignorance.”

“ Sir William Wormwell,” said Amelia firmly, “ I have, up to this hour, regarded you as a most sincere friend, but I now look upon you as a most specious, treacherous enemy.”

“ My dear creature, do not apply such harsh, cruel terms to him who adores you !”

“ Leave me, sir, instantly !”

“ Amelia !”

“ Sir—how dare you thus address me ? What have you ever perceived in my conduct to lead you to imagine that this insult would be endured ?”

“ My dear creature, since you will not allow me to call you Amelia—loving you better than all the world, I would not for the whole world insult you.”

“ But you have, sir, insulted me grossly.”

“ Then on my knee I beg pardon—and while on my knee—since love is no crime—let me entreat you to listen to me but for a moment.”

“ Rise, sir, and leave me !”

“ I will not until I have, at least, declared that ardent passion, whose fire consumes my very soul.”

Again Amelia rose and seized the bell rope, but her hand was arrested by Sir William, who exclaimed “ For heaven’s sake, for the sake of your own reputation, which I prize far more highly than life, do not ring that bell again. Amelia! I *must* call you so—if you cannot look upon me with affection, at least consider that you have made me what I am—that your beauty has inspired me with love which I never had for any living creature before—that your gentle, amiable disposition has caused me to centre every hope I have in you; consider this, dear, lovely Amelia—consider, also, that you are the slave—the devoted slave of one who is now, at this very hour, wantonly, heartlessly, brutally ridiculing the patient love of her whom he solemnly swore at the altar to cherish; and having thus considered, you will not, and I feel that you will not, spurn him who adores you. Amelia—my soul’s idol—you are the only one on earth—”

“ *Will* you leave me !”

“ Yes ; when I have laid bare my heart.”

“ Already I perceive it—I perceive that it *swells* with baseness.”

“ No—upon my honour !”

“ Honour !—honour and treachery cannot co-exist ; therefore leave me !”

“ Nay listen to me but for a moment. What *have* you to fear ?”

“ Nothing ! strong in the affection of him whom you have basely defamed, and deriving additional strength from a due appreciation of my own honour, I have nothing to *fear*, but I will not, in silence, tolerate an insult.”

“ My dear soul, again let me beg of you to believe that I would not insult you for the world.”

“ Again let me remind you that I have been insulted. I will not, therefore, hear another syllable. So thoroughly disgusted am I with your conduct, that unless you leave instantly, I will cause you to be so far degraded as to be forced by my servants from the house. I now ring the bell again,” she added, suiting

the action to the word. "It is therefore for you to decide."

"Is Robert below?" she inquired when the servant had made his appearance.

"He is, ma'am."

"Desire him to come up. You perceive, she continued addressing Sir William, "that I am resolved."

"My dear soul, the servants could never force me from the house; were they to make the attempt, I should convert them into foot-balls for sport; but having too much respect for you, to cause any disturbance, I will, as you wish it, at once take my leave; but in the perfect conviction that before many hours have passed, you will have ample reason to believe that all I have stated with reference to him, by whom you are thus heartlessly neglected, is true."

"Robert," said Amelia, as Bob at this moment entered; "show Sir William out."

Bob bowed, and looked precisely as if a slight explanation would have been very agreeable, for he did not pretend to understand it.

Collecting his faculties, however, he vanished, and Sir William, having offered his hand to Amelia, by whom it was proudly rejected, slowly followed him to the door.

“Well,” thought Bob, having performed the great duty thus imposed, with appropriate grace, “of all I ever heard of since Great Britain was a little un, this breaks the bank. It’s a regular queer go. Why should I have been appointed? It isn’t as if he wished to make me a present, because he didn’t! nor is it as if he wanted to do me the honour to make me believe that he liked me to let him out better than any one else, because he looked blessed cross! I’d give a little trifle to get at the bottom of it: something’s a fluctuating, safe! It’s so mysterious! But mysteries is queer, any day in the week.”

Although the firmness of Amelia never forsook her for an instant, while in the presence of Sir William, although her eyes flashed indignantly as she repulsed him, while her lip curled with withering contempt; the very moment he had left her she burst into tears.

“Stanley!” she convulsively exclaimed. “Dear Stanley! why, do you not return to me!—why by your absence thus seem to confirm the suspicions awakened by that vile man! Where are you, Stanley? Can it be—No! I’ll not believe it!”

Tortured by apprehensions which could not be calmed—racked by the recollection of those dreadful intimations upon which she could not for one moment cease to dwell; she paced the room in a state of mind bordering on distraction until midnight, when in piercing tones, she fervently ejaculated: “God! grant me patience!”

The agony, the excruciating agony, she endured between midnight and dawn may be conceived. Every hour teemed with fresh apprehensions, every hour was fraught with additional confirmation of those suspicions which she zealously laboured to banish from her mind. Nor when the time, which after a weary lonely night usually brings with it some consolation, had arrived, when the glorious sun had mounted and shedding his lustre upon the earth, seemed designed by a benefi-

cent God to inspire every creature with happiness—was she less sad : indeed, as the day advanced her anguish increased, for she knew not what to think, nor how to act. She had, on a former occasion, sent round to his friends and had thereby incurred his displeasure ; she therefore dared not send to them in this instance, nor did she feel, judging from what she had heard, that inquiries among his friends would be otherwise than useless. She could therefore do nothing but sigh, and sob, and weep, and pray for patience.

Sir William, whose vanity the repulse he experienced the previous evening had seriously wounded ; conceiving that the spirit of Amelia would be subdued by the continued absence of Stanley, resolved about noon to renew the attack. He therefore returned to the charge with this infamous object in view, and feeling persuaded that unless he had recourse to a *ruse* of some sort, Amelia would not see him, he sent up his card, with an intimation that he had a message from Stanley which he was anxious to deliver without delay.

The first impulse of Amelia on receiving this

card was to cause herself at once to be denied; but, on reflection, being naturally anxious to hear in any shape from Stanley, she directed the servant to show him up.

With apparent humility and penitence, the miscreant thereupon entered while Amelia stood firmly and proudly, although impatient to receive the communication he had to make.

“My dear madam,” said he bowing profoundly, “I have to offer ten thousand apologies for my conduct last evening which may have appeared—”

“Sir,” interrupted Amelia, “I require no apology. You have, I am informed, a message from my husband.”

“I have; but before I deliver that message I must beg of you to pardon those ardent expressions which may have appeared *prima facie* unwarrantable if not indelicate, but which, let me assure you, were prompted by that inextinguishable affection with which your surpassing amiability and beauty have inspired my soul, and which nothing on earth, not even your scorn, intolerable, as it is—”

“ I presume,” said Amelia with dignified firmness, “ that your object in obtaining this interview with me, is that which you announced.”

“ It is. But why treat with this cruel coolness, one who has your happiness so nearly at heart ; one whose every hope is centred in your smile, and whose highest aspirations—”

“ If, sir, your object be that which I have been led to presume, it is—”

“ Nay, why so relentless? why so impatient?”

“ Have you a communication from my husband, or have you not?”

“ Beautiful Amelia! On my knee while worshipping the idol of my soul, I implore you—”

“ Albert!” exclaimed Amelia, rushing towards her brother, who at this moment entered the room.

“ Hallo! I say! well? what’s the row?” cried Albert as Amelia clung to him convulsively. “ Any thing broke? That’s a pretty position for a man to be diskivered in! But,

Meley, you don't mean to say you've been insulted?"

"Grossly, Albert, grossly!"

"You have!" exclaimed Albert, leading her to a couch. "Well, I say, old boy!" he added turning to Sir William. "What do you mean?"

"What is it to you?" cried Sir William indignantly.

"What is it to me? Oh! that's it, is it? Ah; well, I'll soon explain to you what it is to me. Do you ever do anything in this way, old fellow?" he added striking him fairly to the ground. "I say, Meley, my girl, who is this snob?"

"Your card, sir, your card?" demanded Sir William. "I shall not make a blackguard of myself, but I insist upon having your card!"

"Don't trouble yourself, old fellow, to insist! I'll leave it exactly between the eyes;" and planting a tremendous blow in that precise spot, he added: "now you'll not forget the address."

"Who are you?" cried Sir William bleeding profusely as he rose.

"Now where's your handkerchief? Don't spoil the carpet!"

"Who are you, sir?"

"Snooks!"

"I insist upon knowing who you are!"

"Timothy Snooks, Esquire, I tell you; number two and a half at the top of the monument. At home every day, except Sundays. Isn't that sufficiently explicit? But I say, old girl, where's Stanley?"

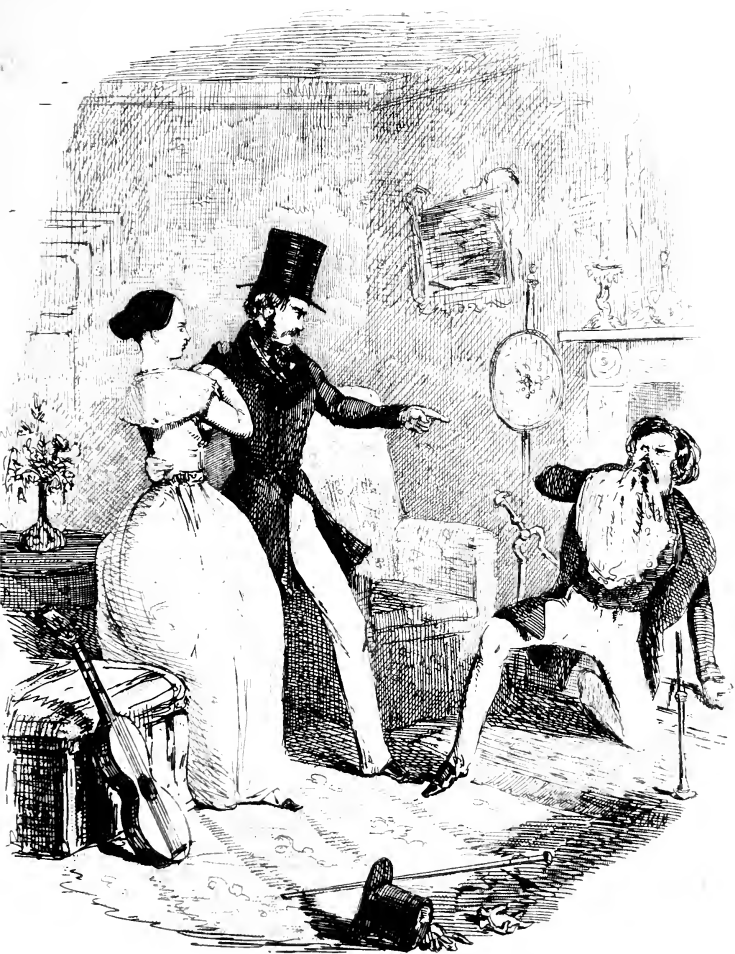
"I don't know, Albert dear; he knows, but he will not tell me."

"I say, old fellow, I'll bet you ten to one, that if Stanley were here you wouldn't have an eye to look out of! Where is he? I'll give you my card—at least I'll chalk my address upon the crown of your hat, and bet you fifty pounds to sixpence that I'll lick you to a mummy if you'll tell me now where Stanley is?"

"Your card, sir, is all that I require."

"Is that all?" said Albert ringing the bell.

"Well let's have your hat. I should like to give you every possible chance, because you



John Lee Jr

sport a respectable pair of moustachios. I say you, Jem," he added coolly, when the servant appeared, "send Bob up with this fellow's hat. But, Meley, what's the matter? You look very pale! Where the devil is Stanley?"

"I'd give the world to know," returned Amelia.

"Now then," said Albert as Bob entered, "have you got this fellow's hat?"

"I've got Sir William's hat, sir," replied Bob.

"Sir William's! what, this fellow's?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then get us a bit of chalk."

Bob, ever prepared to enter into the spirit of a scene of the kind darted off for the chalk, and while Sir William was endeavouring to staunch the blood, which still streamed from his nostrils, Albert led Amelia from the room, and assured her that phlebotomy, as a means of subduing the passions, was the finest thing in life.

"Now then," said he on returning to the room, just as Bob reappeared, "have you got that chalk, Bob?"

"No, sir; but here's a bit of whitening."

"That will do. Write my address upon the crown of that hat."

"Touch it," cried Sir William, "and I'll strike you to the earth!"

"I can do it, sir, very respectable!" said Bob as he commenced operations. "I went to the very first national school in nature."

Sir William rushed at him furiously, and in an instant Bob measured his length on the floor.

"Now I tell you what it is, Bob," said Albert, "if you don't thrash this fellow, I shall never have a decent opinion of you again."

"Oh, I'll have a turn with him," said Bob, because he ain't no gentleman which strikes another gentleman unawares."

"Keep off!" cried Sir William. "It is you," he added turning to Albert, "you, sir, with whom I have to deal."

"Oh, very well; let Bob and you decide this little affair, and then you and I can come to some settlement."

"Who are you, sir?"

"Snooks!"

“ Who is this person ?” cried Sir William, addressing Bob.

“ Am I to tell, sir ?”

“ Of course.”

“ Mr. Albert, Sir, misseses brother.”

“ Here is my card.”

“ Oh, if that’s what you mean,” said Albert, “ here, old fellow, I’ll accommodate you in any way ; here you are—now then—here’s mine. But I say, Bob, are you going to let him off so ?”

“ Why you see, sir, although I don’t like to be hit for nothing, Sir William’s a particular friend of master’s, that’s the point. Had it been any body else, I should have gone in regular, but it don’t seem to agree with my digestion to strike a gentleman which master respects.”

“ Oh, very well ; now, do you want anything else of me ?”

“ Sir,” replied Sir William, “ you shall hear from me again !”

“ Well, let it be soon ! But before you go, just let me explain to you, quietly, *Sir* William,

that you are a most degraded coward, a most contemptible poltroon, a treacherous blackguard, and a consummate villain."

"That's sufficient," cried Sir William, as he left the room in haste.

"Well, I had an idea," rejoined Albert, "that it *would* be pretty nearly enough. I shall be here," he added, shouting at the top of the stairs—"I shall be here for the next three hours!"

Sir William heard him distinctly, but made no reply, and when he had left, Albert returned to Amelia, who explained to him in confidence all that had happened, and whom he did all in his power to soothe.

It had been the intention of Sir William to solicit the forgiveness of Amelia in the event of his being convinced of the impossibility of attaining his object, and to beg of her to keep the affair a secret, having, of course, no desire that it should reach Stanley's ears; but as he now felt that concealment was entirely out of the question—that the thing must, to Stanley, in its worst shape, be known,—he re-

solved to meet it boldly, and at once, and with so much promptitude did he act, that in less than an hour after having left the house a note arrived from Colonel Coleraine, in which he called upon Albert to refer him to a friend, with a view to settle the preliminaries of a meeting.

This somewhat puzzled Albert at first, for, at the moment, he knew not whom to refer to, feeling sure that General Johnson would not take upon himself the responsibility of allowing him to go out. At length, however, it occurred to him that Villiers, a Cambridge man, who had twice been a principal in an affair of the kind, was then in town: and to him he, therefore, at once referred Colonel Coleraine, and dispatched Bob with a letter, advising him of the fact of his having done so, and explaining the circumstances by which it had been induced.

Villiers undertook with alacrity to act on the part of Albert, and was soon after waited upon by Colonel Coleraine, when, as every thing like an amicable arrangement of the matter was utterly out of the question, a meeting was

appointed to take place that evening at Wormwood Scrubs.

Of this Albert was duly advised, and he prepared himself accordingly, but remained with Amelia—whom he, of course, kept in ignorance of the affair—until Villiers called for him in his cab, and drove him to the place appointed.

On their arrival they found Sir William already on the ground, and he certainly looked like a man who had been cruelly ill-used. He and Albert, however, took no notice of each other, but paced the field with folded arms.

The seconds consulted. The weapons were examined, and prepared. The ground was measured, and the principals were placed.

“Now,” said Villiers, “understand, when I drop this handkerchief, fire!”

Sir William took a cold-blooded aim: he was evidently bent upon mischief, while, as Albert stood, not a muscle moved: he was pale, indeed, and thoughtful, but firm as a rock.

“Are you ready?” cried Villiers. “Now! —One—two—three!”

The signal was given. Both at the same

instant fired!—and the next, Sir William fell.

The surgeons—for two had been engaged—rushed at once to the aid of the fallen man, and it was evident that the pain he endured was excruciating, for, as he writhed and rolled about the ground, he groaned dreadfully.

The wound was discovered promptly, and examined; and the result of that examination was, that the patella of the right knee was found to have been shot clean away, and that Sir William had been thus lamed for life.

CHAPTER XVI.

IN WHICH AN OLD FRIEND RE-APPEARS.

STANLEY, who was, of course, quite unconscious of all this, and who had been throughout the day anxiously expecting Sir William—in the evening dispatched a messenger with the following note :—

“ DEAR AMELIA,

“ Why do you not either come or send to me? I am tortured with impatience. Wormwell, who has, of course, explained all, has not been near me the whole of the day. Send a note by the bearer. All will soon be well; but do not neglect

“ Your own,

“ STANLEY.”

This note Amelia read again and again with-

out being able to understand what it meant. Certainly Sir William had stated that he knew where Stanley was, but then he had endeavoured to induce the belief that he was in disreputable society, and yet Stanley himself evidently thought it strange that she had neither gone nor sent to him.

While dwelling upon these conflicting features of the mystery, and before she had had time to solve any one of them, Albert returned with a smile of triumph, and having kissed her with unusual warmth, for which she could not pretend to account—the note was placed into his hands.

“There has been,” said he, having read it, “some treachery here.”

“But where is he?”

“Oh, that we can soon ascertain from the fellow below. I’ll inquire.”

He did so : and, on being informed, sent his card back by the messenger, and desired him to tell Stanley that he would immediately be with him.

“I see how it is,” said he, on returning to

Amelia, "I see through it all. That scoundrel was sent by Stanley yesterday to tell you where he was?"

"Is he safe?"

"Oh, he's *safe* enough! that's beyond *all* doubt. He never, I should say, was more safe in his life. He is at present residing in the house of a sheriff's officer."

Now it is a remarkable fact that on hearing this, Amelia exclaimed "Thank Heaven!" not precisely because the house in which he had been detained was that of a sheriff's officer—for under any other circumstances that would have been held to be a dreadful calamity—but because she had been led to apprehend that the house at which he had been staying was of a much worse character: so amazingly do all great troubles diminish when they come in lieu of those which we have been led to anticipate, and which are in our view greater. "But," she added, "I hope that it is not of much importance."

"Oh, no!" replied Albert, "he has been treating with contempt some indignant tailor,

who conceiving himself to be an entire man, and therefore having the insolence to imagine that he ought to be attended to, has placed his bill in 'my solicitor's hands' as a matter of revenge, or something of that sort. However, I'll go to him and then I shall hear all about it."

"Do, Albert, do, dear; and tell him that indeed I had no idea of where he was. But had I not better go with you?"

"No, no; you remain here and make yourself happy. He'd prefer it, I know."

"You will not be long, dear?"

"I'll not. I'll return as soon as possible."

He then started off, and on reaching the house threw Stanley into a state of the most intense astonishment, by relating to him all that had occurred. He concealed nothing from him: the design upon Amelia's honour, the falsehoods by which the miscreant sought to further that design, the thrashing he received, the duel and its result were all minutely explained, while Stanley developed a greater variety of passions than were ever perhaps

experienced within the same period by any one man.

His affection for Amelia was, however, in the ascendant. He felt then that he loved her more fondly than ever, and when the first burst of just indignation, inspired by the execrable baseness of Sir William had subsided, he smiled at the idea of *her* virtue being assailed, and marvelled that the villain should have been so great a fool as to attempt that which he might have been sure was impossible.

Having sufficiently dwelt upon this, he proceeded to explain to Albert why he was there, and this, of course, very naturally led to the consideration of the means by which his release might be obtained.

"Now I'll tell you what it is old fellow," said Albert, "I'd better go at once to the governor."

"Not for the world!" exclaimed Stanley. "I would not let him know of it for twenty times the amount."

"Well, what do you think then of the old

General. "*He* knows a trick or two, it strikes me. Shall I go and tell him."

"No, that will not do ; the rest would know of it immediately."

"Well, then, shall I go and explain it to your mother ?"

"What could *she* do in the matter ?"

"Well, who the devil shall I go and tell ? I must go and tell somebody !—somebody must know of it !—something must be done !"

"Will you call upon this attorney ?"

"I'll tell you what, old fellow, I'd dig, if I could, right clean through from us to our antipodes to serve you, but I will not call upon this artful varment because I'd bet a million I should only make a mess of it, and thus do you more harm than good. What could I say to him ?"

"You could ask him, at all events, what he means to do."

"So I can ; but just look at the result. I go and I say to him, 'Now, old fellow, what do you mean to do in this business ?' His answer will be, 'I mean to keep him in custody, of course, until the amount claimed be

paid.' 'But it's a swindle.' 'I know nothing about that: I am employed to get the money and the money I must have.' 'But we'll bring it to trial.' 'You can't: you have already suffered judgment by default.' 'Then I'll tell you what it is, old fellow, we'll indict the whole gang for conspiracy!' His reply would be 'Do so; but let me strongly recommend you in the first place to find out the men.' *I* should never be able to get over such a fellow as that. You must send some venerable old swell, one who knows how to manage him. However, as nothing can be done in the matter to-night let us dream about it. Something will have suggested itself, doubtless, by the time I come down in the morning. You'll be at home when I call, I suppose?"

Stanley smiled.

"Well come, old fellow, give us a glass of wine, and I'll be off."

Stanley rang the bell, and in due time an attendant appeared.

"I say, old boy," said Albert, "give my love to Mrs. Moses—"

"Isaacs," said Stanley, "Isaacs."

“ Oh, Isaacs is it ? ” Well it’s all the same. Give my love to Mrs. Isaacs, and tell her to send up a bottle of her most superb port ; tell her to let it be *nishe*.”

The attendant vanished, and when the wine had been produced, Albert took a couple of glasses, pronounced it to be very good of the sort, although the sort was rather queer ; and having promised to be with Stanley very early in the morning, left with a strong recommendation which touched immediately upon the wisdom involved in the act of a man keeping up his spirits.

On his return to Amelia, Albert explained to her all that he imagined a woman ought, under the circumstances to know, and which singularly enough was very little : indeed, seeing that it will not take up much space here, it may as well be stated in full :—“ Well, old girl—seen him—sends—his love and so on—right as a rook—happy—comfortable—slap rooms—wine—everything regular—soon be home—little mess—settled in no time. But,” he added, “ as I shall sleep here to-night let’s you and I

talk about business. In the first place we want some experienced old file just to take this little matter in hand. Question is, who can we get?"

"Why I should say," replied Amelia, "that papa would be the most proper person to apply to, and I am quite sure that no one would undertake the task with more pleasure."

"But Stanley won't have it. He wants it to be kept dark at home. Do you think now his mother knows, any old boy?"

"I should say so."

"Does the old girl go to bed early?"

"Not very."

"Is she in bed now, think you?"

"Oh! no."

"Well, then, suppose we go and call upon her at once."

"Would Stanley approve of it?"

"Oh, we mus'nt be too squeamish. He has got himself into a mess, and we must now get him out of it. She may know some one who can do the trick at once. Go and put on your things, and I'll send for a coach. You can

explain it to her, because you know all about it. I can put in a word or two, you know, here and there.”

Although apprehensive that Stanley would be displeased when he heard of the step they were about to take, Amelia, believing that it ought to be taken, followed Albert’s instructions with all possible dispatch, and they started.

Finding, on their arrival, that the Widow had not retired, they sent the servant up to announce them, with an intimation that they had just called to ascertain whether they might appear at that most unseasonable hour, without a scolding, or not.

Although this was done that the Widow might not be startled, she was startled, nevertheless.

“Gracious!” she exclaimed, as she met them at the drawing-room door. “What has happened? *Is* there anything the matter?”

“I knew that our appearance would surprise you,” returned Amelia, “but for this you must scold Albert, not me. I have, however, to

propose that we leave him here, while we have a little conversation in private."

"Oh, as you please," cried Albert. "You treat me just as you like, and being a patient animal I endure it."

The ladies then retired, and Amelia proceeded to relate what had occurred, with all possible calmness ; but when the perfidy of Sir William had been duly explained, in addition to Stanley's arrest, the Widow became so bewildered, that she confessed, with great candour, that she really didn't know exactly whether she was at that particular period asleep or awake.

"Man, man !" she exclaimed. "Man, man ! They are all alike—all ! But I could not have believed it of him. He never attempted—he never hinted—he never appeared even to think of such a thing while with me ! But then whom do you know ?—whom *can* you know ? Positively, no one ! While I live, dear, I'll never put faith in man again ! But what are we to do for poor Stanley ? We must not allow him to remain where he is. What *can* be done ? How are we to act ?"

“Albert has something to propose,” replied Amelia. “Perhaps, as you are now in possession of the facts, we had better return to him.”

“By all means, my love. But who would have thought that Sir William, above all other men in the world, would prove himself to be such a monster? Well!—so much for man!”

“Albert,” said Amelia, on their return to the drawing-room, “you have something to suggest.”

“Why, yes,” returned Albert. “You see,” he added, addressing the widow, “I don’t know how to manage this business myself, and as I won’t make a mess of it, I won’t interfere.”

“Very correct,” observed the Widow; “extremely correct!”

“Now, I was thinking,” pursued Albert, “that as Stanley objects to the interference of the Governor, you might know some artful, experienced, old, venerable-looking individual, who would’nt mind taking the matter in hand. Do you know such a one?”

“Why—let me see,” replied the Widow,

considering. "I do know a gentleman—a perfect man of business—"

"The very thing!—just the very fellow we want."

"But," continued the widow, "I don't see—really—how I can—now—with any degree of propriety—send to him."

"Does he know Stanley?"

"Oh, yes, perfectly. He has known him from childhood."

"Then *he'd* do it—oh, he'd do it! Shall I go and see him? What's his name?"

"Why—his name," replied the widow, "is Ripstone." And as she pronounced that name she slightly blushed.

"Ripstone; ah! well," said Albert, "I never heard of him; but where does he live? I'd better call upon him the first thing in the morning."

"Why—I'm thinking of its propriety!—And yet—I don't know—Stanley, it is true, might not like it."

"Oh, he'll not be very particular now. He wants to get out, and somebody must get him

out, that's quite clear. Application ought, therefore, to be made to the best man. Do you think he would do it?"

"Oh, I'm sure he would, with pleasure!"

"Well, then, why not apply to him at once?"

"Well—I don't know—perhaps it is very ridiculous for me to hesitate. I *think* that I might."

"Oh, yes!—do it at once. Let me call; or you send for him. Write a note now, and I'll take it myself."

"Do you think that I had better?"

"Decidedly! I'll take care that he has it early enough in the morning."

The Widow, whose pulse was then more than a hundred, hesitated again; but at length, calling up all the courage at her command, she opened her desk, with the view of writing to Ripstone.

She had, however, scarcely dipped her pen in the ink, when she became impressed deeply with the difficulties which surrounded the task she proposed to perform. How could she address Mr. Ripstone? In her judgment "Sir" would

be much too cold—"My dear Sir" somewhat too warm; and while "My dear Friend" would be warmer still, "Mrs. Thorn presents her compliments to Mr. Ripstone" would be, under the circumstances, out of character altogether.

Perceiving her embarrassment, although quite unconscious of the real cause, Albert, after waiting for some time, suggested that the better plan would be for him to call upon Mr. Ripstone, and to explain to him that she was anxious to have the benefit of his advice, and as this suggestion met the widow's views, for she found it impossible to get on with her pen, she gave Albert the address, with a variety of instructions, when he and Amelia left her, to collect those faculties of hers which had been so completely upset.

Early on the following morning, Albert waited upon Mr. Ripstone, and that gentleman received him with marked politeness, and assured him that Mrs. Thorn was a lady whom he highly esteemed, and that there was no soul on earth whom it would give him greater pleasure to serve.

“ I suppose, Mr. Joliffe,” he added, “ it’s something—something—”

“ Yes, it is,” replied Albert. “ In fact, I may as well explain it all to you now.”

“ If you please,” said Mr. Ripstone, who knew that it would save him a world of trouble, by rendering the creation of a host of conjectures unnecessary. “ I should be glad if you would.”

Albert did so : he explained, at least, all that had immediate reference to Stanley, and having finished that explanation, Mr. Ripstone accompanied him to the residence of the Widow.

It is in all probability unnecessary to state, that Mr. Ripstone was expected, and equally unnecessary is it, apparently, to explain that as he *was* expected, the widow was somewhat longer than usual at her toilet, and looked, when he arrived, as sweetly as possible. These were facts which all persons who appreciate the blessings of civilization will readily conceive, and as such is the case, it will be quite sufficient to state that fascination is a fool of a word to use, when the object is to convey a

correct idea of the imposing effect of her general appearance.

“My dear madam,” said Mr. Ripstone, as he entered, and approaching her he pressed her hand with all his wonted warmth. “I am happy, most happy, to see you looking so well.”

The widow smiled, and bowed in acknowledgment of the compliment, which really at the time met the approbation of her own heart, but she felt notwithstanding very tremulous.

“It is some time,” she observed in faltering accents, “since I last had the pleasure—”

“It is,” said Mr. Ripstone, with considerate promptitude; “but we will not, my dear madam, dwell upon that. Mr. Joliffe has explained to me all that has reference to the matter upon which you would have my advice; and, although I cannot sufficiently express to you how highly honoured I feel in having been thus applied to, I would submit, that the best advice I can offer, under the circumstances, is, that you will consent to leave the management of the whole affair to me.”

“ You are a kind, good creature,” observed the Widow, “ I know not how to thank you.”

“ Then, my dear madam, don’t attempt to do it. With your sanction, I will call upon Stanley at once. I have no doubt that the matter will soon be arranged : at all events, it shall be if I can arrange it.”

“ Of that I am sure, my dear friend, very sure ; but I am quite ashamed to give you so much trouble.”

“ Believe me,” rejoined Mr. Ripstone, “ nothing ever gave me more real pleasure than this opportunity of serving one from whom I have experienced such high consideration.”

The Widow blushed deeply, and felt extremely droll, and when Ripstone had explained that he should do himself the honour of calling, from time to time, in order to report progress, he again pressed her hand, and with an expression of profound respect, left her inspired with some of the oddest feelings that were ever experienced by a lady in either ancient or modern times.

On his arrival at the lock-up house Stanley

was somewhat startled by his appearance, but when his object had been explained, and the character of his motives developed, he treated him with all possible courtesy, and conversed with him on the subject in the most friendly spirit; and that he really appreciated his kindness, was a fact which he did not attempt to conceal.

Having obtained from Stanley all the information he had the power to impart, Ripstone set to work, and by virtue of indefatigable zeal, he, with the aid of his solicitor, who was also one of his oldest and most esteemed friends, succeeded, in three days from that time, in buying up the whole of the bills, and thus setting Stanley free !

From that auspicious period, Mr. Ripstone became a great favourite of Stanley's, and while Amelia held him in high respect, he was securely reinstated in the Widow's ardent heart. He dined with her constantly: indeed, scarcely a day passed on which she was not visited by Mr. Ripstone.

And thus things went on for a month, during

which the Widow frequently felt—indeed she could not but feel—that he might as well come to the point at once; but although he had perfectly made up his mind, although he had again and again resolved to take, without any further delay the contemplated step, he had never been able to screw his courage sufficiently up.

One evening, however,—this tiresome month having expired—when he and the Widow had been sitting for some time in silence, he gave a most resolute sigh.

“Well,” thought the Widow whose heart that sigh fluttered, “it’s coming at last.” She spoke not, however, nor, had she not felt it to be a duty incumbent upon her to echo that sigh as a matter of strict justice to herself, would she have broken the silence by which it was succeeded for worlds.

A pause ensued—a long, a painful, a most provoking pause—during which Ripstone zealously twirled his bunch of seals at the rate of three thousand turns per minute, while the Widow was apparently lost in admiration of the pattern of the lace with which her handkerchief was bordered.

At length Ripstone spoke, and as he did so, the Widow's susceptible heart put on the steam, and its action was, in consequence, indicative of the highest possible pressure.

"I recollect, my dear madam," said he, "that when I was comparatively poor,"—and here it will be highly correct to state, that since that period an extremely ancient uncle of his had departed this life and left him the whole of his wealth—"I recollect that a certain lady whom I held, and still hold in high esteem, on one occasion solicited my advice on a certain—delicate—subject."

"I see, I see," thought the Widow, "I see." And she prayed that Ripstone might not break down.

"Now," pursued Mr. Ripstone, deliberately weighing every word, and dwelling upon its import and probable effect. "Now, as that lady—that is to say as the question—I mean the subject—or rather the advice which that lady solicited was somewhat—at least she considered it to be somewhat—delicate, do you think—I merely put it to you, whether, you think—that

I could, without any impropriety, solicit the advice of that lady on a subject, perhaps, equally delicate ?”

The widow looked archly, and smiled, conceiving that her playfulness might inspire him with a *little* more courage ; but Ripstone whose countenance then was as rigidly solemn as before, added, “ What do you *think* ?”

“ Why,” replied the Widow, “ the question is one which appears to be surrounded by difficulties ; still I do seriously think that you might !”

“ Well now, do you know, the same thing has struck me two or three times, of late, and as your views and mine upon that point coincide, I think I will !”

“ Oh, I would by all means ! There cannot be any impropriety in it.”

“ Then, of course, you understand—I mean, you guess—the subject upon which——”

“ Nay, how is that possible ?”

The expressive countenance of Mr. Ripstone was screwed into one of the most fascinating smiles ever beheld, as he observed in winning accents ; “ It strikes me you do.”

“How is it—how can it be possible? You have not explained.”

“Do you really require any additional explanation?”

“What a very droll creature you are;” observed the Widow; and as she made that remarkable observation, she smiled with so much sweetness, and looked with so much archness, while her brilliant eyes beaming in liquid delight, shone with such sparkling lustre, that she absolutely dazzled Ripstone’s faculties to an extent which rendered them perfectly chaotic. “When,” she added, conceiving it to be highly inexpedient to suffer any moral confusion to induce irresolution and consequent delay, “when I ventured to express an opinion that there could not be any impropriety in adopting the course you propose, I did so in the perfect conviction that you could propose to adopt no course in which there *was* the slightest impropriety.”

“You are polite enough to say so,” observed Mr. Ripstone, who felt a little better; “but I nevertheless do want a little advice.”

“ What *do* you mean, you funny man ?”

“ I’ll tell you,” cried Ripstone with desperate nerve, for he felt that unless it were forced out, it would not come out at all—“ I’ll tell you at once : I want to marry : I want to marry a lady—a certain lady ! Very well. Now I want to know how I’m to go to work.”

“ Well—it may appear presumptuous in me, certainly—but I think that I might give you a little advice upon that point ! Do I know the lady ?”

“ Oh yes,” replied Ripstone chuckling at the idea of that state of astonishment into which he conceived the widow was about to be thrown, “ you know her perfectly ! no one, in fact, can pretend to know her better than you !”

“ Oh ! well, then the difficulty will not be great ! Has she any idea of your intentions ?”

“ I think she has :” replied Ripstone, smiling with singular significance, “ I think so ! at all events, it strikes me she has.”

“ Well then, all you have to do is—but you know much better than I *can* !”

“ No, no : upon my honour : I have had no experience in that matter : you have.”

“ Well, I can only say what I should do if I were in your situation.”

“ Exactly : yes—that’s the very point.”

“ Well, I’d go to her and say at once something to this effect : ‘ I have been thinking that marriage, being a state from which springs every species of social felicity—is one into which those, by whom social felicity is appreciated, ought to enter : I have also been thinking that—as you and I have known each other long enough to know that our views and feelings upon every point of importance coincide—if *we* were to marry our happiness would be increased ; so certain am I that, even taking but a common-sense view of the matter, we should be one of the most comfortable couples in existence.’ ”

“ Well, my dear madam ?—and then ?”

“ Why then you would have but to say, ‘ What do *you* think ?’ or in order to bring the thing at once to the point, ‘ In a word, will you have me ?’ ”

“ Very good—and then her answer ?”

“ Oh, I cannot tell what that would be.”

“ Can you not tell what *your* answer would be ?”

“ Mine !—Under the same circumstances ?”

“ Precisely. Conceive that all you advised me to say to her I have said to you : for you are the lady !—the only one on earth whom I would thus address. Now, what would be your answer ? Nay what *is* your answer ? Will you have me ?”

The Widow blushed—that she felt herself bound to do of course—and was silent ; but Ripstone, as she prudently fixed her eyes upon the carpet seized her unresisting hand, and having kissed it very correctly—pressed it to his heart, exclaiming, “ Yes !—I will answer for you—Yes !—You will be mine.”

“ You are a kind, good creature,” said the Widow, having sufficiently paused, “ one whom I would not for the world deceive.”

“ Of that I am convinced !—I know that you would not !”

“ My dear good friend, I feel it to be my

duty then to state to you, that in a pecuniary point of view, I am unfortunately not in the same position as that in which I once stood."

"I know it!—I know in fact more on that subject than you imagine; but what of that? I have sufficient; much more than sufficient to enable us to live in the style to which you have been accustomed: therefore let us not say another word about that. There is, by the bye in connection with this subject, one favour I have to ask, in fact one stipulation I have to make: it is this, that the whole of the property you now possess, be settled at once upon Stanley."

"Kind, generous, good soul!" exclaimed the Widow.

"Then to this you consent?"

"With feelings of mingled gratitude and esteem to which I cannot give expression," replied the Widow, and the tears sprang from her eyes, as she reflected upon Ripstone's consideration for Stanley—"I do."

The compact was then, in the usual manner, sealed—indeed, they sealed it in the usual

manner many times in the course of that truly happy evening—and so fully did they enter into each other's views, and so perfect was the understanding which existed between them, that within a week—everything having been arranged to the entire satisfaction of all concerned, including Stanley—they stood at the altar, and with feelings of joy—in the cheering presence of their most highly valued friends—were united.

CHAPTER XVII.

BRINGS THIS HISTORY TO A CLOSE.

By virtue of a little finessing on the part of Mr. Ripstone, who privately assigned more stock, than his lady at the period of their marriage possessed, Stanley's income was raised to a thousand a year; and having by this time purchased sufficient experience not only to guard him against the designs of dashing knaves, but to inspire him with an utter contempt for those fashionable follies, in which there is neither manliness, justice, nor reason, he resolved to enjoy those substantial delights of which honour and love are the germs.

Had he previously to his marriage seen more of what is denominated "life;" had he entered into the senseless frivolities of that "life"—for

which the appetite soon palls and which, in reflecting minds soon create disgust—before he undertook the duties of a husband, his heart, which was of a manly generous caste, would never have permitted him to treat with neglect one so amiable, so gentle, as Amelia. He now, however, saw that that neglect—although it proceeded in his case solely from thoughtlessness and irresolution—was unmanly, if not indeed brutal; and having proved what a god a man is in the judgment of a patient affectionate wife, he became one of the most attentive and considerate husbands that ever charmed a gentle spirit with joy. Then, indeed, did Amelia deem herself blessed. His whole soul seemed centered in her. He appreciated fully her innumerable virtues, and that appreciation alone was the source of pure happiness to both.

Sir William he never again met by any accident: indeed, since his affair with Albert, the old associates of that honourable person had spurned him; not in consequence of that affair nor of the villany which induced it; but because a dissolution of Parliament having oc-

curred at that period, he lost his seat to which he was not re-elected, when his creditors pounced upon and forced him into the Bench, within the Rules of which he lived and died, rather than give up the miserable wreck of his fortune.

Nor did Stanley ever again meet with "Captain" Filcher; but a circumstance occurred about twelve months after the bills became due, which put him in possession of certain facts having reference to that gallant gentleman, and which it will be therefore correct to explain.

Passing on that occasion with Stanley through Burlington Arcade, Amelia stopped at one of the windows to admire a box of extremely delicate French gloves, and, being desirous of making a purchase, she entered the shop, which was well-stocked and fitted up with infinite taste. The very moment, however, she had entered with Stanley, the young person in attendance sighed deeply and almost fainted.

"My precious!" exclaimed a more elderly

person, rushing forward at the moment. "My precious!" and turning round she almost fainted too, as Stanley recognised in them the "Countess" and her mamma.

Of course Amelia thought this rather strange, and looked somewhat seriously at Stanley.

"Do you know these persons?" she inquired.

Stanley who had previously related the whole of the circumstances, privately explained who they were, when turning to Mrs. Gills, he observed that he was happy to see them in a position of so much comfort.

"Oh, Mr. Thorn!" cried that lady: "my poor deluded daughter!" she added, as the tears gushed from her eyes. "You know, sir, how she was deluded."

"I do," replied Stanley; "but I hope that she is now more happy."

"It was not wickedness on her part. That is the only consolation I have. I know, sir, how you were deceived too by that second monster."

“What has become of him? where is he now?”

“He has his reward, sir: oh, yes! he has his reward. But if you and your lady would condescend to step this way, sir, I shall be happy to explain all.”

Being anxious to know something about the scoundrel, Stanley at once accepted the invitation, and he and Amelia were led into a neat little room immediately over the shop, when Mrs. Gills, with due eloquence and spirit, related all that had occurred since the elopement; of which the substance was, that on her arrival at Calais, Filcher explained to the “Countess” the real nature of her social position—that he promised to marry her himself—that he never performed that promise—that in three months from the time it was made, he deserted her, and that in less than a month after that he was duly apprehended for swindling, and as a conviction followed, he had been in a French prison ever since: that on the return of the Countess to England, an application was made to the Earl; that in consequence of that appli-

cation having been treated with contempt, an *exposé* was threatened, and that eventually in order to avoid that, he consented to pay a certain sum down to enable her to get into business, and to allow her an annuity of fifty pounds for life.

Amelia having listened with the utmost attention to the relation of these circumstances which occupied nearly two hours, felt an amiable interest in the welfare of the "Countess" and promised to do all in her power to promote it. This promise she faithfully kept, as well by direct patronage as by recommendation, and in order to give an earnest of her intention, she purchased that morning to the amount of twenty pounds.

It appeared, however, that during the whole of their difficulties, Mrs. Gills and her daughter had one firm friend, and that that friend was Mr. Joseph Coggles; and as it may be in all probability remembered that during the progress of this history, that venerable gentleman—"Venerable Joe"—has been alluded to before, it will not perhaps, to some be unin-

teresting to state that he faithfully married the gentle Joanna—that she wore what he termed the “oh-no-we-never-mentionables” strictly—that she naturally considered them to be an excellent fit, and very comfortable things too she found them—that he went to smoke his pipe every evening at the sign of the “Cat and Constitution”—a house kept by his valued friend Bob, to whom Stanley lent nominally, but actually gave, a sufficient sum of money to take it; and that the venerable gentleman was the oracle of the parlour, the frequenters of which were at all times delighted with his profoundly philosophical dissertations.

And as to Bob! Bob was a great man! For independently of the profits which the retail business of the Cat and Constitution daily yielded, he derived an immense emolument from the fact of his being Stanley’s “right hand,” his Master of the Horse, and Purveyor-general of Wines and Spirits not only to him, but to the whole of his family and connections.

For some considerable time, however, after

this, Bob remained single, for having made up his mind not to marry until he met with the counterpart of Amelia whom he had always much admired, he could not so soon, as many might have expected, see one in his sphere possessing those points of resemblance which he deemed essential; but as at length, a favourite niece of his venerable friend arrived in town, a mild, quiet, amiable girl, one indeed who met his views to a shade, the consequence was that they soon became enamoured of each other, and having married, they were exceedingly affectionate and happy, and had in due time a very fair family of children.

But in the height of his prosperity, and he certainly was very prosperous, Bob never ceased to look upon Stanley as the best friend he had. There was nothing a man could do that Bob would not with pleasure have done to serve him. Indeed Stanley was an universal favourite. The General prided himself upon having laid the first stone of that which he cautiously termed his reformation, and while the Captain, in common with the whole of his

friends, highly admired his character, it scarcely need be added that Amelia was proud of him as a husband, and that the *ci-devant* Widow, who had settled down with Ripstone to the tranquil enjoyment of life, was beyond all conception proud of him as a son.

THE END.

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